

# *The Alexander Thomson Society Newsletter*

Nº27, September 2000

## **'Breach of developers' rights' threatens Thomson's office**



**E**ARLIER THIS YEAR, the society was due to give evidence at the public local inquiry into application for listed building consent by County Properties Ltd to demolish the stone-fronted house in West Regent Street cleverly enlarged by Thomson in 1872 and in which he installed his office. This case has a long and unhappy history, as outlined in earlier *Newsletters*, but the inquiry was provoked by the astonishing, if typical, decision by Glasgow City Council to grant planning permission and listed building consent for the demolition of this abused but salvageable building in the very year of the Thomson exhibition and of Glasgow's reign as UK City of Architecture and Design. This was rightly opposed by Historic Scotland: hence the inquiry.

The planned public inquiry was twice postponed, owing to a challenge by the developer to the legality of Historic Scotland's opposition. Now it has been superseded by an astonishing legal decision which not only threatens this particular

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**Inside: Thomson's Architectural Theory • Problems at  
Egyptian Halls • A Thomsonian art gallery in Milwaukee**

## Cases

listed building but all historic buildings in Scotland.

On Tuesday, 25th July, as reported in *The Herald* for 20th July and *The Scotsman* for 28th July, Lord Macfadyen in the Court of Session ruled that the proposed inquiry breached the developer's rights under the European Convention because the Reporter at a public inquiry is not impartial or independent as he or she is employed by the Scottish Ministers. Scotland signed up to the European Convention at the time of devolution.

To quote an editorial in *The Scotsman*, "What the good judge has done is to rule that decisions by the Scottish executive summarily to call in planning applications from local authority adjudication, then appoint its own reporters to advise ministers on whether or not the development should be permitted, is a major breach of the European Convention on Human Rights. Article 6 of the convention provides that in the determination of civil rights each citizen is entitled to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal."

The implications of this decision are alarming. It would seem to deny the right of a nation to safeguard its cultural heritage by establishing a body of expert advisers and a system of protection enshrined in law. It certainly undermines our own rights by removing the forum in which we were prepared to defend the retention and

restoration of a significant historic building connected with Alexander Thomson, for unless the Scottish executive appeals against this decision, there seems to be nothing to stop County Properties demolishing the building in West Regent Street and erecting their mediocre and ill-mannered alternative.

No doubt the good judge would like to see all planning and listed building appeals conducted in a court of law – which would be more cumbersome and more expensive. That, of course, would mean yet more fees for lawyers. It would also mean greater costs and more difficulties for independent objectors like ourselves. The response of the Scottish executive and Historic Scotland to this débâcle has yet to be announced at the time of writing. It may be to privatise the system of Reporters. Whatever it is, action must be taken quickly, not just to protect this particular listed building but all listed buildings in Scotland. For, thanks to Lord Macfadyen or, rather, thanks to the naïvety of the politicians who signed up to the European Convention (Westminster hasn't), if a developer wishes to remove, say, a Grade A listed building by Robert Adam in, say, Edinburgh, all he has to do is apply for listed building consent and then object that his so-called human rights are breached when Historic Scotland asks the Scottish Ministers call in the case.

The law is an ass.

## Egyptian Halls

EARLIER THIS YEAR, it was hoped that the legal problems surrounding the ownership and therefore the future of Thomson's finest commercial building had at last been resolved.

Following the serving of a compulsory purchase order by Glasgow City Council in 1996, further damaging delay was threatened by changes of ownership and the threat of litigation, but in the event this was avoided by Mr Derek Soutar of Union Street Developments acquiring majority ownership. An admirable structural and conservation report was commissioned and, with the support of Historic Scotland, the long overdue restoration and refurbishment of this largely derelict city-centre listed building seemed imminent. While the future use of the upper floors of the building has not yet been decided, the Society was very happy with the conservative approach to the necessary structural repairs advocated by Peter Stephen & Partners, engineers, and the Morrison Partnership, architects.

Now the future of Egyptian Halls is again in jeopardy: Scottish Enterprise Glasgow has informed the owner that it cannot now provide £245,000 grant assistance to the project as "it is not a priority in terms of the Operating Plan 2000-

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01" and "does not fit with any of the priorities for Scottish Enterprise National". Yet, only three years ago in its former guise of the Glasgow Development Agency, this publicly-funded body felt able to assist a more destructive scheme for Egyptian Halls which did not respect the integrity of Thomson's iron framed interior. Particularly as one of Scottish Enterprise Glasgow's ostensible aims is "the development, redevelopment and improvement of the environment", it would be interesting to learn why the improvement of Union Street through the regeneration of a largely unused commercial masterpiece by an internationally celebrated Scottish architect, now recognised as being one of Glasgow's great heritage assets, is not regarded as being of economic benefit to this city.

### The Caledonia Road Church

SCAFFOLDING HAS gone up on the tower to enable stabilisation and repair work to be

carried out. However, the much vaunted and long awaited competition to develop the adjoining site and find a purpose for the remains of Thomson's great church has still not been formally announced by the Crown Street Regeneration Trust.

### The St Vincent Street Church

WORK BEGAN in July on the upper part of the tower as the first phase of the long-awaited restoration of the church. The architects in charge are Page & Park. This phase is being supported by the World Monuments Fund.

Unfortunately, there is no firm news about the future of Heron House, which, whether the building is retained or replaced, has a significant impact on long-term plans for the church.

### Eton Terrace, Oakfield Avenue

A DETAILED condition survey of the terrace was carried out

by Opfer Logan Architects in February. We hope that this may lead to the long overdue repair of this important domestic terrace by Thomson, but this is impeded by the usual problems of divided and multiple ownership.

### Grecian Buildings

THE REFURBISHMENT and alteration of Thomson's warehouse (*above*) being carried out by Page & Park, architects, for the Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) is proceeding.

Seeing the work being carried out to the three-bay villa around the corner in Scott Street makes one regret that the scheme did not include the creation of the large porch on the street slope allowing first floor access between the two buildings clearly visible in the perspective drawing of Thomson's complete design published in the *Building News* for 11th September 1868 after the original drawing recently presented to the Glasgow School of Art by Dr Ronald McFadzean and reproduced in the new book, *Alexander 'Greek' Thomson* by Gavin Stamp.

### West Nile Street

THE ORIGINAL design by Thomson for the three shop fronts at 99-105 West Nile Street (*over*) has now been recovered or recreated as part



## Normal service will be resumed very shortly...

*The Hon. Secretary writes:*

One of the benefits of working for oneself is the ability to move work around so that the enjoyable things in life – delving into obscure records for information about Thomson's relatives, for example – can be given prominence over the less interesting task of working to earn money.

A change in my own circumstances – I have stopped being self-employed and become a civil servant with a great deal of travelling involved in my work – means that much of the time I was previously able to devote to the Society has been seriously curtailed. This has led to enormous backlogs of work relating to handling membership applications and renewals, dealing with orders for Society materials, and producing the *Newsletter* (hence the gap since the last issue).

The solution is technically simple: divide the work that needs to be done among the people able to undertake it. Finding the people to do those tasks, however, is something that often proves difficult for voluntary and amenity organisation – and The Alexander Thomson Society is no exception (witness the volume of work on behalf of the Society undertaken each month by the Chairman).

New arrangements for dealing with memberships are currently planned to address that area, so that the time taken to respond to members' enquiries is drastically shortened, and other issues resolved much more quickly.

In the meantime, I hope all members who have been inconvenienced by my tardiness will accept this apology in the spirit in which it is offered.

*Dominic d'Angelo, Hon. Secretary*

of the restoration of the stone facade carried out by Design Management Architects. Much new stone has been introduced and the contrast between this and the surviving weathered stonework highlights the philosophical problem implicit in the restoration of this type of historic building.

## The Thomson Headstone

THE PROJECT to place a suitable monument on the grave of Thomson and his family in the Southern Necropolis has now received a boost with the generous offer of £7,000 under the Lord Provost's Millennium Award Scheme. The Glasgow Institute of Architects, with the backing of this Society, is now seeking donations to secure the rest of the £24,000 needed to realise the design by Edward Taylor and Graeme Andrew which won the 1999 Alexander Thomson Memorial Studentship competition. The competition was organised by the GIA, of which Thomson was once president, and which founded the award in his name after his death (The second recipient of that prize was Glasgow architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh). The site of Thomson's grave, in the Gorbals, overlooks one of the architect's finest works, the Caledonia Road Church.



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The winning design was illustrated in *Newsletter* No.25, but it is now hoped to execute it in black granite, possibly brought in from Ireland or Portugal, rather than polished concrete.

Help – and suggestions – from members is invited to end a long-running scandal. No record exists of any tombstone or memorial, but it is highly unlikely the grave of Glasgow's greatest architect was not originally marked. The grave has been unmarked since the clearance of headstones in the dismal 1950s.

Fiona Sinclair of the Glasgow Institute of Architects said of the announcement: "We are obviously thrilled that the city, through the Lord Provost's Millennium Fund, has been so generous towards the appeal. This funding will help us attract further support towards the ultimate goal of around £24,000 for the work."

Co-architect Graeme Andrew said: "This is an excellent boost to the funding and we now hope that the reality of a fitting monument for the Thomson family is now a step closer".

## Looks like carelessness...

MEMBERS INTERESTED in the full detailed horror of the story of the wilful destruction of drawings and documents which might have illuminated

Thomson's life and work by institutions which ought to have known better during Glasgow's darkest days in the three decades after the Second World War are referred to the article by Gavin Stamp, 'It looks like carelessness, or, in search of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson' in *Scottish Archives, The Journal of the Scottish Record Association*, volume 5, 1999, pp.12-28.

It is a depressing read. The information was acquired in the course of the research undertaken for last year's exhibition at The Lighthouse, *Alexander Thomson: The Unknown Genius*. Can we be confident that those looking after what remains of Thomson's archive will behave better in the future?

## Civic Trust Award for Holmwood

ALEXANDER THOMSON'S Holmwood House was among seven Glasgow projects honoured earlier this year in the largest and most respected environmental design awards in Europe. The 2000 Civic Trust Awards also recognised such projects as the renovation of the A-listed Charles Rennie Mackintosh Martyr's School in Townhead to the extensive redevelopment of the city's Tron Theatre. Lord Provost Alex Mosson and Civic Trust Awards manager Ms Julia

Thrift paid tribute to the winners at an awards ceremony in Glasgow.

The citation for Holmwood House read: "Holmwood was designed in 1859 by the famous Glasgow architect, Alexander Thomson. When built, it was in a wonderful rural location with views of the ruined Cathcart Castle. By the mid-1990s, however, the area had become part of Glasgow's suburbs and the house itself had suffered from alterations and neglect. As a result of commendable determination on the part of the Alexander Thomson Society and the National Trust for Scotland, Holmwood has now been restored to a state as close as possible to its original condition. Meticulous research into the original designs and materials has resulted in a memorable building that needs to be seen to be appreciated."

## The Alexander Thomson Society Committee

*Chairman:* Gavin Stamp.

*Hon. Secretary:* Dominic d'Angelo.

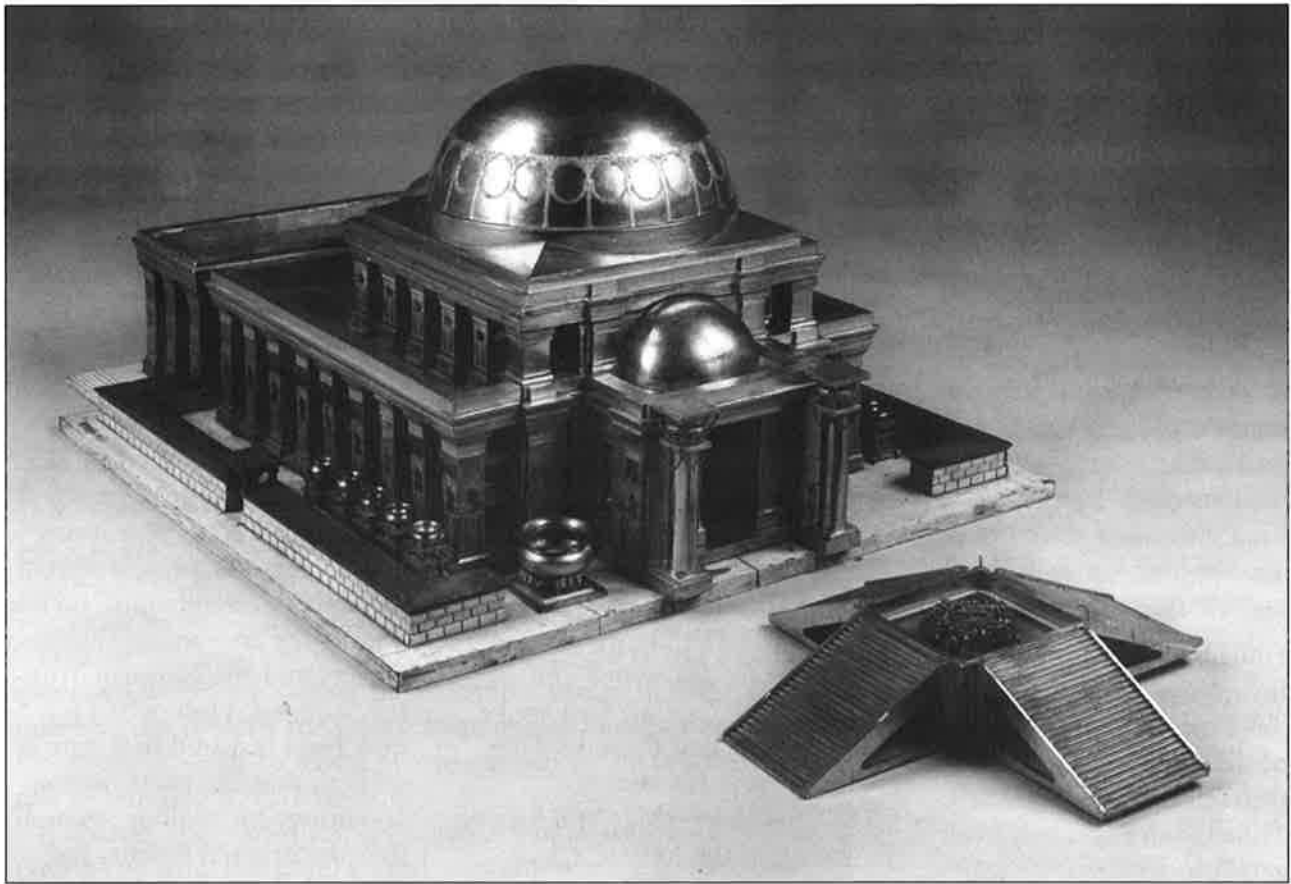
*Hon. Treasurer:* Irene Stewart.

*Hon. Minutes Secretary:* Lesley Kerr.

*Committee:* Mark H. Baines, Roger Guthrie, Alan McCartney, Pippy McEwen, Professor Sam McKinstry, Matthew Merrick, Mary Miers, Graeme Shearer, Sandy Stoddart.

*Patrons:* The Earl of Glasgow, Professor Andor Gomme, Professor Andrew MacMillan.

# Sold: The Temple of Solomon



**T**HIS PICTURE – kindly sent us by Bonhams of Knightsbridge – shows a model of the Temple of Solomon which was in their auction sale of March 29th. Made of gilded wood and gilt paper by J.W. McKinnon of Messrs Bartlett of London in 1883, it realises the design of the Temple of Solomon described in the first Book of Kings, the second Book of Chronicles and in the Book of Ezekiel as interpreted by Thomas Newberry (1811-1901), editor of the *Englishman's Bible* of 1870.

This model was the centre-piece of the Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition mounted

at the Royal Albert Hall in London in 1887.

We illustrate this model to illuminate Edward Taylor's articles here by making the telling contrast between a reconstruction of the Temple of Solomon proposed by a biblical scholar and the imaginative metamorphosis of the idea of the Temple proposed by a great architect in a real building – namely the St Vincent Street Church by Alexander Thomson.

Bonham's catalogue entry for the item read:

'An important gilded wood model, circa 1883, of the Temple of Solomon by J.W. McKinnon of Messrs. Bartlett,

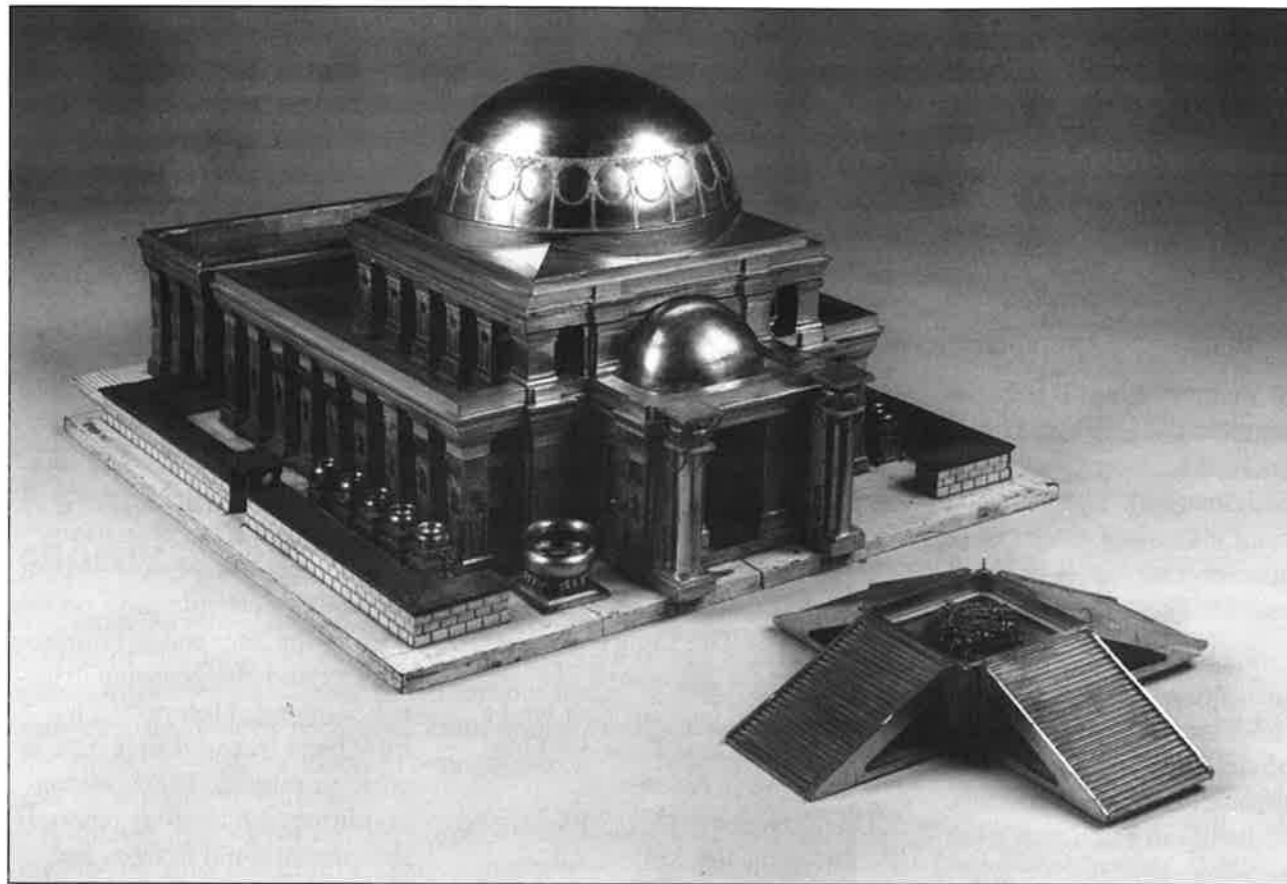
18 Blenheim St, London. £10,000-15,000.

Exhibited: London, Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition, 1887.

Built on a scale of 1:60 (1 in. to 5ft.) the model is made of gilded wood and gilt paper with appurtenances fashioned in silvergilt, electrogilt and electroplate. The work took three years to complete and can be dated from the silvergilt pieces which bear the Birmingham assay marks of W. Spurrier, 1883.

The model was constructed to the specific designs of Mr Thomas Newberry from research based on descriptions in the first book of Kings,

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Alexander Thomson's public lectures, including his Haldane Lectures on art and architecture and his sensational attack on Gilbert Scott's Gothic design for Glasgow University, are here for the first time brought together here in a single volume. They reveal him as a powerful and eloquent speaker, and confirm that not only was he one of the most original architects of his time, but also that his was one of the greatest minds in Scottish architecture.

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### The Newsletter

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Second book of Chronicles and other details supplied in the last nine chapters of Ezekiel. The construction of the Temple of Solomon commenced in 966 BC and was completed in 959 BC, it was erected by Solomon on Mount Moriah in the place indicated by God to Solomon's father, David. The Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC.

Thomas Newberry (1811-1901) was the author of a number books and is principally known as the editor of the *Englishman's Bible*, also known as the *Newberry Study Bible*, published in 1870. It is presumed that Newberry travelled around the British Isles with the model ostensibly to preach, promote and expound a better understanding of the Scriptures between the English and the Anglo-Jewish peoples.

The model formed the centre-piece of the Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition and was displayed in the 'Crush Rooms' of the Royal Albert Hall. The exhibition opened on 4th April 1887 with the purpose to: pro-

mote a knowledge of Anglo-Jewish History; create a deeper interest in its records and relics; to aid the preservation of such records and relics and to determine the extent of the materials which exist for the compilation of the history of the Jews in England.

The exhibition lasted for twelve weeks and was visited by almost twelve thousand people of all denominations, it was 'a most successful undertaking' and widely reported, including a special supplement to the *Jewish Chronicle*.

### Bibliography

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*The Works of Thomas Newberry*; Assembly Writers' Library, Glasgow, 1979 and 1985.

# George Ashdown Audsley and the Layton Art Gallery

**When one of the Society's early foreign forays took it to Liverpool, a long-dead pair of architect brothers made an instant impression as one of the few firms to continue work in Thomson's Greek idiom after his death. The Audsley brothers also designed the Thomsonian Bowling Green offices in New York, which featured in an early 'Newsletter', but an art gallery in Milwaukee – now lost – was perhaps their most impressive achievement.**

FROM THE time of its construction between 1885 and 1888 to its demolition in 1957, the Layton Art Gallery stood on the north-east corner of Jefferson and Mason streets in Milwaukee.<sup>1</sup> It had been designed by the London architect George Ashdown Audsley (1838-1925) and, filled with classic European paintings and sculptures, its carved, pillared front made it look quite up to its solemn purpose.

It was an extraordinary piece of architecture. Commanding rising ground between the Milwaukee River and Lake Michigan, the Layton Gallery distinguished itself as a public institution among the clubs and churches around it: its front and sides were clothed in deeply projecting pillars; its single story was the majestic height of any two in the neighbouring buildings; it was built of light beige materials in contrast to the yellow limestone and red-and cream-coloured brick of the city. And it was mysterious as well as monumental. A striking syncopated double rhythm

across its facade was created by pillared window surrounds set between the piers. The pillars themselves were ornamented with elaborate, unfamiliar spiral patterns derived from ancient Greek designs, archaic in their flat carving, exotic in their originality, and highly refined in their calculated curves and countercurves. The Layton Gallery facade recalled the European connoisseurs' and bohemians' neo-Greek art of the mid-nineteenth century – an imaginary primitive Greek style (with traces of the still more primitive Egyptian) evoked by just this play of archaicism, exoticism, and refinement – a glimpse of a lost early moment of Hellenic culture.<sup>2</sup> The products of a parallel neo-Greek movement in painting were represented in the gallery's collections by the works of Alma-Tadema, Lord Leighton, and Bouguereau. The Layton Gallery's architecture was more specifically the reproduction of the neo-Greek style invented by the Scottish architect Alexander 'Greek' Thomson, as critics noted, but a powerful and uni-

fied rendition of that vocabulary, producing one of the most sophisticated designs carried out in the Midwest before 1890.

The story of the gallery's design was related by its donor, Frederick Layton, in his inaugural remarks of April 5, 1888. The British-born Layton owned a meat-packing business that frequently took him across the Atlantic to Liverpool and other parts of England. According to the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 26, 1883, a preliminary interior plan had been obtained on a visit in the summer of 1883:

On my voyage across the Atlantic, Mr. I. W. Audsley (*sic*) sat next to me at table. His brother, G. A. Audsley, of Liverpool, now of London, is an architect, and so it came about quite naturally that I should meet him. Mr. Audsley showed me some very beautiful buildings he had designed, and I asked him to draw me two plans for a gallery – one for a lot 60 x 120, and one for 120 x 120. I liked his style of architecture very much, but did not accept either of the plans, as they were two stories above the ground, and the galleries had to be on the upper floor in order to admit proper light. Later on my neighbour on board ship paid me a visit, and we talked over the situation and looked over the ground, and I asked: can we not have a building one story above the basement, about 80 x 100 feet, in the centre of our ground that will look well? Mr. Audsley thought we could and so we sketched out my idea, and in due time received the design for our present building. This plan I

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accepted with the understanding that Messrs. E. Townsend Mix & Co. might work jointly with him in carrying out his design, but to arrange and plan certain parts of the building as they thought best.<sup>3</sup>

The gallery was a private donation, and the lack of Layton family papers prevents us from clarifying and confirming this story in detail, but it fits with what we know. Since the early 1880s a group of Milwaukee collectors had been exhibiting paintings by leading contemporary European artists in temporary space and were seeking a permanent gallery. When he departed for his English trip in the summer of 1883, Frederick Layton had conferred with them as well as with his friend, the European-trained painter Edwin C. Eldridge, and intended to examine European art galleries with this permanent space in mind. On July 12, 1885, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* announced: 'Frederick Layton, who is now in Europe, is expected to return about September 1. He will bring with him when he returns the long-delayed plans for the Layton art gallery. Work will be commenced upon its construction immediately upon Mr. Layton's arrival, and the foundation will be laid during the fall.' The same journal on October 2, 1885, carried a lengthy description of Layton's project:

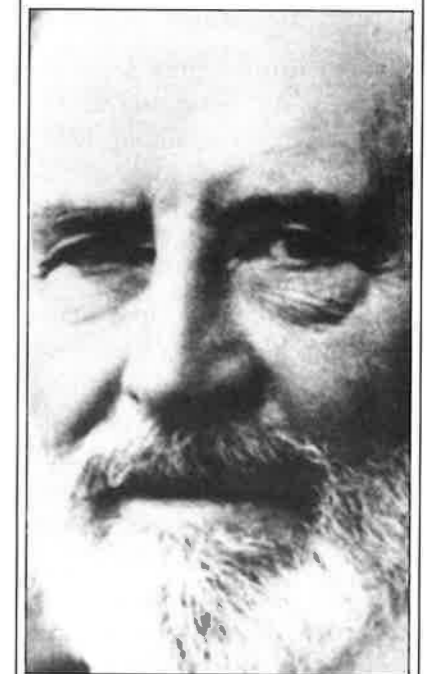
The plans were made by noted architects and publishers of art books, W. J. and G. A. Audsley,

of London. They were brought to Milwaukee by Mr. Layton on his recent return from Europe, and were submitted to E. T. Mix & Co., for approval. Mix & Co. will have charge of the building work, as the English architects are too far away to look after it.

The article states that the foundation should be complete by winter and included a plan identical to that executed. The commencement of excavation for the foundation was announced on October 6, 1885.

The Milwaukee Art Museum possesses a nearly complete set of undated ink drawings on tracing paper for the ornamental detailing of the building signed "W. & G. Audsley, F.R.I.B.A., London." In addition, in 1964, Mr and Mrs Jack Waldheim of Milwaukee gave the museum two drawings, one of the elevation, the other of its plan and section, also signed "W. & G. Audsley, F.R.I.B.A., London," and again undated. All of these drawings show the building precisely as it was erected and accord with a rendering of it published by Audsley in the English journal *Building News* for November 27, 1885, and again in the *American Architect and Building News* on January 23, 1886. The architects are given in these two publications as "W. & G. Audsley, F.R.I.B.A., London, and E. T. Mix, Milwaukee." A version of this last drawing exists among the Partridge Papers at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, signed with the initials of Edwin

## The donor



FREDERICK LAYTON (1827-1919), born in England of poor parents, emigrated to Wisconsin in 1842. Several years later, he began a meat-packing business with his father in Milwaukee that prospered for over fifty years. By 1880, he was collecting paintings by contemporary European and American academy-trained artists. Layton appreciated traditional, accepted art consistent with the standard for connoisseurship of middle-class English businessmen. Along with the art gallery, he donated his collection and a \$100,000 endowment.

The Layton Art Gallery opened on 5 April 1888 and was demolished in 1957.

J. Meeker, who worked from the drawings of Audsley and Mix, altering Audsley's staffage.<sup>4</sup>

Audsley would thus seem to have been the designing architect, just as Layton stated. Mix, however, was the leading architect in Milwaukee.<sup>5</sup> From his arrival in Milwaukee in 1856 to his death in 1890, Mix was architect of the principal mansions, churches, and commercial buildings in the city, including dwellings for Layton's friends and relations (Alexander Mitchell and the Plankintons) and the magnificent Chamber of Commerce (1879-81). Mix and John Roberts, the mason contractor, saw to the proper execution of the design. This would seem to have involved some ingenuity in executing Audsley's ornament: salvaged fragments show that the volutes over the windows were carved in wood and that the capitals were executed in terra cotta by the Chicago firm of True, Brankhorst & Co. British masons would have executed it entirely in cut stone, but either efficiency or a lack of skilled labour required modifications in Milwaukee.<sup>6</sup>

On November 24, 1886, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported that the gallery walls were up but that work had had to be suspended for winter before the roof was on; on January 4, 1888, that the building was complete structurally and soon to be opened. On March 10 of that year, Layton gave the build-



ing together with his collection of paintings and a \$100,000 endowment to the Layton Art Gallery Corporation to manage the gallery. On April 5 it was inaugurated, with Layton's friend Edwin C. Eldridge as curator.

Upon its inauguration the Layton Gallery consisted of three large top-lit painting galleries opening at the sides and back of a central sculpture hall. The sculpture hall opened toward Jefferson Street across a pillared vestibule and portico with the curator's office, a retiring room, and a staircase to the basement in the corners. In 1916 the Milwaukee architect William H. Schuchardt added further gallery space to the north side of the structure. From 1927 to 1931 further interior alterations were carried out by the firm of Eschweiler and Eschweiler. The gallery was not intended to function as an art school – the Milwaukee School of Art nearby performing that function – although permission could be requested

to copy paintings in the galleries.

The architectural distinction of the Layton Gallery is attributed to at least two factors: its London architect and its conception as a connoisseurs' gallery more than a teaching institution. George Ashdown Audsley himself was an extraordinary personality, and was, in fact, neither English nor solely an architect: his death certificate records his profession as writer and organ builder and his birthplace as Elgin, on the north coast of Scotland.<sup>7</sup> His deathplace, furthermore, was Bloomfield, New Jersey. We hear little of him in the major architectural books and press and the one lengthy profile of him comes as a postscript, by his friend T. Scott Buhrman, to Audsley's volume on organ building, *The Temple of Tone* (1925).<sup>8</sup> Yet, from these sources and from some modern research, a sketch of his career can be assembled.

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ticed to the local architects A. & W. Reid. In 1856 he and his older brother, William James, established themselves in Liverpool as architects and key-makers. Another source adds that George had worked in Liverpool for the borough surveyor, John Weightman. As architects the Audsleys developed a solid practice, designing the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Princess Road (1865), the synagogue and Bowes House across the street (both 1874), St. Margaret's Church (1876), as well as the Racquet Club (1879) and perhaps 92 Bold Street.<sup>9</sup> The success of the Liverpool Synagogue brought them the commission to collaborate with an architect known only as Joseph on a church in London on St Petersburg Place (1877-79). The churches were in the high Victorian Gothic style (although very individually rendered, especially in the round-arched St. Margaret's); the synagogue in a somewhat

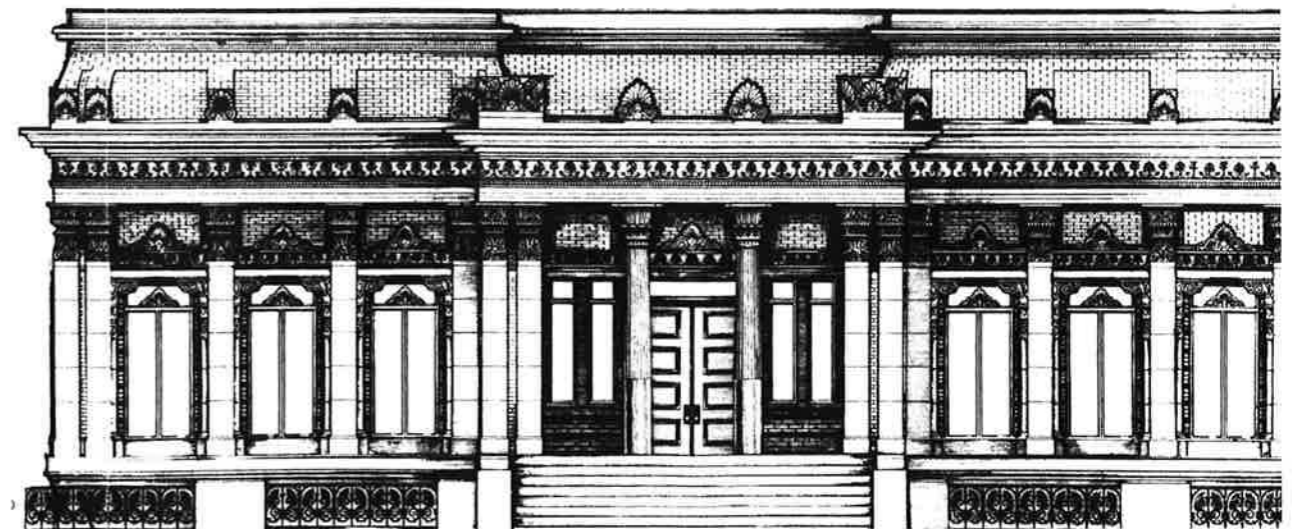
Moorish style enthusiastically praised at the time, the Racquet Club in the exotic 'neo-Greek' of the Audsleys' fellow Scot 'Greek' Thomson.<sup>10</sup>

Simultaneously the Audsley brothers commenced their literary endeavours, publishing a builder's pattern book, *Cottage, Lodge and Villa Architecture*, in Edinburgh in 1868, and several chromolithograph-illuminated volumes. In 1861 they had published a small *Guide to the Art of Illuminating and Missal Painting*. In 1870 came a volume *Colour in Dress: a Manual for Ladies*, often reprinted. By the 1880s they were publishing volumes on building decoration, including *Outlines of Ornament in the Leading Styles* (1881) and *Polychromatic Decoration as Applied to Buildings in the Medieval Style* (1882). Most interestingly, during the 1870s George Audsley became very close to the Liverpool collector (and client) J. L. Bowes and collaborated with him on a number

of publications relating to Japanese art, newly discovered in Europe. In 1880-81 the brothers moved to London, where they seem to have been engaged in publishing rather than design, then in 1892 to New York. Their second move may have been connected with their most extraordinary work there, the Bowling Green Building at 5-11 Broadway, a sixteen-story steel-framed skyscraper erected in the style of 'Greek' Thomson in 1895 (Fig. 3).<sup>11</sup> It was built by English investors and one might speculate that they had sent the Audsleys out as their agents.

Papers surviving with George Audsley's descendants record that the Audsleys also did a design for a Catholic cathedral for New York which was not executed.<sup>12</sup> As compensation they were named architects of the Church of Edward the Confessor in Philadelphia, erected in the Gothic style in

*Continued on next page*



1903. *The Architect's and Builder's Review* of October 1897 also records the Audsleys entering a competition for the design of a new Catholic cathedral in Newark, New Jersey. Buhrman adds to this list the English Church at Grasse in the south of France. It also appears that Audsley visited the Midwest in the summer of 1889, and we may glimpse him in a letter of June 5 from the Chicago heating contractor Louis Laflin, writing to his wife in Waukesha, Wisconsin:

Awsley (*sic*) turned up at the church and stuck to me all evening, coming to the Calumet Club after all was over. It is as Mattie said, Awsley has engaged passage for London and expects to sail July 20th. He was full of stories and amused a number of the Calumeters with anecdotes.

If skyscrapers and cathedrals had drawn the Audsleys to New York, it was organ building that sustained the older brother, George. Buhrman relates that he had already been fascinated by organ building in Liverpool, listening to the great organist Best playing the instrument in St George's Hall. George had erected an elaborate instrument of his own devising in his London house, where he held popular musicales. Soon after his arrival in the United States, he garnered commissions for several important organs, starting with that for the Festival Hall at the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition of 1904 in St Louis (purchased by John Wanamaker and installed in his vast store in

Philadelphia, opened in 1911) and including the grand organ of the Church of Our Lady of Grace in Hoboken, New Jersey, and for the Eugene C. Clark House in Yonkers, New York. By now he was in his sixties, but he took up the new opportunity with alacrity, and published articles in the organ journals, as well as his *magnum opus*, *The Art of Organ Building* of 1905, and other volumes.<sup>13</sup> He became the principal advocate of the concert organ, so wide in its range that it can function like a full orchestra. He settled on a hilltop in suburban Bloomfield, New Jersey, and eventually died there surrounded by his family.

For all the characteristically Scottish versatility Audsley displayed in his remarkable career, he regarded the Layton Gallery as his favourite architectural work.<sup>14</sup> It was one of the most powerful and unified works of architecture to be erected in the Midwest before the emergence of Louis Sullivan's mature work with the Wainwright Building, completed in St. Louis in 1891. In its light colouring, compressed mass, and exotically styled classical imagery, the Layton Gallery distinguished itself decisively from a series of museums erected contemporaneously in other major cities of the Midwest, including the first Saint Louis Art Museum building (Peabody and Stearns, 1879-81), the Cincinnati Art Museum (James W. McLaughlin, 1882-86, The Art Institute of Chicago (Burnham and Root, 1886-87),

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BORN IN Scotland, George Audsley received his first architectural training in his native town, Elgin, as an apprentice to the firm of A. & W. Reid. He later worked in Liverpool with his brother, William J. Audsley, designing buildings in Ruskinian Gothic, Moorish, and neo-Greek styles, and from 1881 in London, publishing a number of books on architecture, craftsmanship, and ornament.

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and The Detroit Institute of Arts (James Balfour, 1887).<sup>15</sup> All of these were large structures in the round-arched medieval style of the 1880s, carried out in dark, rough masonry, seen most impressively in the south wings added during this decade to both the American Museum of Natural History and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

All of the midwestern institutions had been founded as design schools as much as exhibition galleries, on the pattern of the Department of Practical Art in South Kensington, London, with its schools of industrial design and its museum, now the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>16</sup> They were the product of a very conscious movement in the United States to establish art museums as the instrument of general, practical design education, on the English premise that this would have industrial as well as philosophical benefits. It began with the establishment of a state system of design schools in Massachusetts in 1870, under the direction of Walter Smith from the South Kensington Museum and centring on the school of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It was brought to Philadelphia with the founding of the Philadelphia Museum and School of Industrial Art after the Centennial Exposition of 1876 (the parent of the present Philadelphia Museum of Art) and carried to St Louis by Halsey Cooley Ives, trained at

the South Kensington Museum and the founder, in 1879, of the Saint Louis School of Fine Arts, of which the art museum was a part. In Chicago, William M. R. French, from 1878 the guiding personality of the Art Institute and its school, emulated Ives's example. In Cincinnati a number of brilliant designers gathered in the University of Cincinnati School of Design during the 1870s – Ben Pitman, Henry Fry, the McLaughlins – who contributed to the founding of the art museum after 1877.

The South Kensington Museum was an insistently practical, expansive, and expandable structure, housing studios as well as large galleries of study collections of minor arts for instruction, with painting and sculpture given secondary emphasis. It had been erected in stages, first in 1855-56 as a light iron shed by the building contractor, C. D. Young and Company, then, during the 1860s, in brick and terra cotta designed by a military engineer, Francis Fowke, and been given a monumental facade designed in the late Gothic style by Sir Aston Webb only at the turn of the century (1891-1909). The institution's American imitators were not so defiantly practical, Sturgis and Brigham adopting the Ruskinian Gothic in their Boston Museum of Fine Arts (1871-76), implying a blending of the more sentimental, moralising ideas of Ruskin with the industrial

objectives of the South Kensington Museum. But when Ives and McLaughlin erected their museums around 1880, they combined Ruskinian emphasis upon 'honest,' exposed construction with the expansive, round-arched medievalism established by the Boston architect Henry Hobson Richardson as the American style of commercial construction.

The Layton Art Gallery was quite distinct from these, both as an institution and as a piece of architecture. It seems a throwback to an earlier period when art was a philosophical enterprise for connoisseurs, embracing only painting and sculpture, a part of classical culture most appropriately housed in a building suggesting contemplation, isolation, Greece, and Rome. This ideal had informed the first great European galleries created at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The first art museum erected in the United States, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts of 1805, was a columned, domed structure. And this image was too deeply implanted in the Western mind for it to evaporate completely before the assaults of Ruskinism or of the South Kensington Movement. There were a number of resolutely Greek cultural buildings erected in America after the Civil War, if all of them somehow peripheral to the main-

*Continued on next page*

stream of art museum construction.

To the buildings continuing the Greek imagery of the beginning of the century, we should add a second important group of structures, the great mansions of increasingly rich American merchants housing collections of classic nineteenth-century European paintings, often in separate gallery spaces open to the public. Frederick Layton's own house was a mostly frame structure near the gallery, but the James J. Hill House in St Paul and the Potter Palmer House in Chicago were immense stone structures with expansive galleries.<sup>17</sup> The Marshall Field and Cyrus McCormick houses in Chicago, designed in the elegant neo-Greek style, housed collections of less importance more informally.<sup>18</sup> The paradigm of the type, however, was inevitably in New York, the W. H. Vanderbilt houses erected in 1879-82 by Charles Atwood and a distinguished team of designers, in collaboration with James Snook (both working under the direction of the decorators Herter Brothers).<sup>19</sup> The most expensive and exotic materials were used, as is seen in the gilt chair inlaid with mother-of-pearl preserved at the High Museum, Atlanta. The *New York Times* asserted that only the pen of Théophile Gautier could do the mansion justice (March 8, 1882), although the stern architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler excoriated what he felt

was unco-ordinated excess (*American Architect and Building News*, May 12, 1881). The culminating example of this type was the library of J. P. Morgan designed by McKim, Mead and White in 1902, attached to the back of his house on Park Avenue. Renaissance in style and exquisitely decorated internally, it was built of marble block set without mortar, only with pins, in conscious reproduction of the laborious but pure construction of the Greek temple.<sup>20</sup> Like these galleries, the Layton Gallery was a private project, filled almost exclusively with Layton's own collection, and like them the Layton Gallery seems a work of art in its own right; a place for private enjoyment as much as public instruction.

A pamphlet published in 1888 by the Layton Art Gallery recording the inaugural events and speeches and describing the institution, designates the style of the facade as "Thompson's (*sic*) variant of the Anglo-Hellenic Renaissance," and after explaining Audsley's mouldings in some detail, concludes:

"The structure may be described as being designed in Hellenic simplicity, elaborated with the floral symbology of Egypt, and yet admirably adapted to the climatic rigors of the American Northwest and to the uses of the popular art gallery."<sup>21</sup>

The *Milwaukee Sentinel* earlier, in its issue of October 2, 1885, had designated the design's style as "new Greek."

The architectural elaboration of the facade, of course, was Audsley's doing, but the decision to adopt this exotic style was Layton's, evidently informed by such models as Lenox's library-gallery and the Vanderbilt houses in New York, but also necessarily informed by their sources, a series of celebrated neo-Greek connoisseurs' retreats in Europe. Layton himself seems to have been a very down-to-earth man, but his art advisor, Edwin C. Eldridge, was more cosmopolitan. He studied at the Antique School of the National Academy of Design in New York in 1868-72 and 1874-75, and is said to have studied widely in Europe.<sup>22</sup> He is supposed to have directed Layton's attention to the more extravagant neo-Greek academic artists, especially Alma-Tadema and Bouguereau.<sup>23</sup>

What Eldridge would have known were the extraordinary studio-residences in London of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema and Lord Leighton,<sup>24</sup> as well as their source, the Palais Pompeien erected on the Avenue Montaigne in 1856-60 by Prince Napoleon.<sup>25</sup> The Alma-Tadema House in St John's Wood, executed slowly to his own designs, was Greek and Roman in parts, with suggestions of more exotic, primitive styles, executed in exquisite coloured materials. The Leighton House, designed by architect George Aitchison and erected in Holland Park in 1877-79, was more overtly

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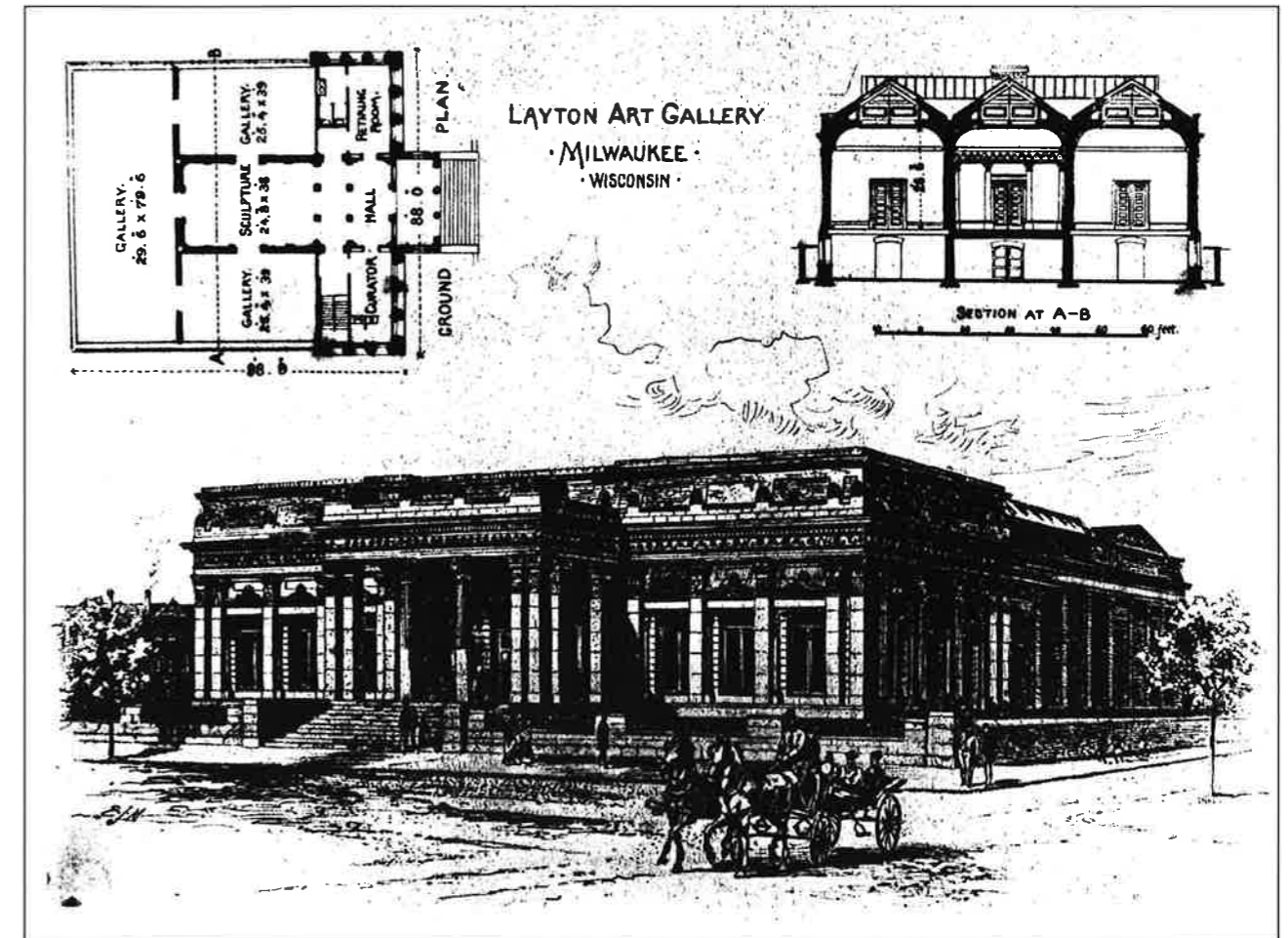
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## The gallery

THE PRESENTATION drawing of the proposed Layton Art Gallery that George Ashdown Audsley made to show his client Frederick Layton was published in *The Building News* of November 27, 1885. As opposed to plans and elevations, such detailed perspective drawings envision the actual appearance of a building in the setting it is to occupy, with light and shadow bringing out its colour and texture. Surrounding space, structures, and foliage are indicated, and in Audsley's drawing a cloud-filled sky as well as figures animate the sheet. This drawing reproduces Audsley's presentation drawing in an impressionistic style, with a lightness and sparkle missing in Audsley's draughtsmanship. Audsley's staffage has also been altered in this sketch by the illustrator Edwin J. Meeker, to whom Audsley and Edward T. Mix lent their drawings of the proposed Layton Art Gallery. It was published in *The Century Magazine*, August 1886, together with other drawings by Meeker illustrating the new Cincinnati, Saint Louis, and Buffalo museums.

The Layton Gallery's unpedimented portico, with its Greco-Egyptian columns, pilasters, and richly ornamented entablatures, the treatment of doors and windows, and use of pilasters to articulate a blank wall all derive from Audsley's inspiration, Alexander Thomson. Thomson's motifs gained in effectiveness through their original adaptation to the Layton Gallery's compact proportions. It has been suggested that Audsley was not the only Thomson-influenced architect working in the Midwest. Frank Lloyd Wright's rejected 1894 design for the Milwaukee Public Library and Museum has been related to Thomson's style, although there is no evidence that Wright knew the latter's work. It is most improbable, however, that he did not know the Layton Art Gallery. Although Wright's 1894 Milwaukee design, like Charles Atwood's similar Fine Arts Building for the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, are more academic in their classicising French sources, it may be that Audsley's Thomsonian gallery reinforced Wright's experience of Louis Sullivan's neo-Greek approach when, in 1894, he also first conceived of the Egyptoid 'Village Bank' for the *Brickbuilder* magazine.

Oriental. The *Palais Pompeïen*, which started it all, was built as a reproduction of an ancient Roman house (complete with a subtly glazed *impluvium*) with its walls frescoed by Sebastian Cornu and its exterior in carefully stylised Greek mouldings designed by architect Alfred Normand. In one room was the 'Temple of the Muses,' a miniature reconstruction of Greek architecture designed by J.I. Hittorff and decorated by Ingres. Prince Napoleon and his friends, including the actress Rachel and the writers Théophile Gautier and Arsène Houssaye, played at being ancient Roman connoisseurs, conversing, reading their poetry, and mounting pseudo-antique theatricals. They lived the world depicted in Alma-Tadema's painting *A Roman Amateur*, purchased by Eldridge and Layton in 1894.

The European connoisseurs' retreat, however, Layton reproduced and transformed through the medium of Audsley and his adaptation of the style of 'Greek' Thomson.<sup>26</sup> Thomson himself had first demonstrated this style in his Caledonian Road and Vincent Street churches in Glasgow in 1856 and 1859, and then in a series of business blocks erected during the 1860s and 1870s. In these designs he elaborated impressive compositions of archaic Greek pillars and lintels ornamented with imaginative surface patterns (often somewhat Egyptian), insisting that arched

construction was much less solid and satisfactory than the elemental post and lintel.

Thomson was not a writer or a critic, but his personal system of design seems in harmony with the immensely influential pronouncements of the contemporaneous Scottish architectural writer James Fergusson.<sup>27</sup> Fergusson published a series of volumes, beginning with his *Illustrations of the Rock-Cut Temples of India* of 1845 (presenting another archaic post-and-lintel style) and continuing with his *Historical Enquiry into the True Principles of Beauty in Art, more Especially in Reference to Architecture* (1849), *Illustrated Handbook of Architecture* (1855), and especially *A History of the Modern Styles of Architecture* (1862, with later, revised editions). He was an amateur, but had a firmly held conviction that archaeological revivalism was bad and that a "modern" style of architecture based on function should be invented. He believed in "progress" in art, on the model of that in science, and, delineating how the Greeks perfected Egyptian architecture and the Goths perfected Greek building, called upon nineteenth-century architects to do likewise, using the whole of the history of architecture as a platform for a new style. He did not set Thomson's work up as a model, but he admired primitive styles suggestive of the neo-Greek for their reduction of building to prismatic masses

simply decorated and, in the last edition of his *History*, picked out the Redpath Museum in Montreal for illustration and praise.<sup>28</sup> Fergusson's works were very widely read, especially in the United States during the 1870s and 1880s; he was the one English-language architectural critic to equal and oppose the influence of John Ruskin.<sup>29</sup> George Audsley was both a designer and a writer (as well as a Scot) and in his work Thomson and Fergusson combine.

The great witness to Audsley's enterprise is one large skyscraper, the Bowling Green Building in New York of 1895. The steel frame for tall office building construction had only just been invented in the late 1880s. By the mid-1890s designers and critics had recognised that the problem in designing a skyscraper was to show the lightness of the revolutionary steel skeleton and simultaneously to give the architectural composition sufficient emphasis to hold it together in spite of its exploded vertical proportions.<sup>30</sup> The expression of lightness was achieved in the Tacoma and Reliance buildings in Chicago – the latter of 1895 by Charles Atwood, now working as chief designer for Daniel Burnham – by the unaccented piling of stories with almost continuous strips of windows, but at the loss of monumental shape. Monumentality Louis Sullivan achieved in his first steel-framed office building, the

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Wainwright Building in Saint Louis of 1890-91, with its deeply relieved vertical piers running from the third floor to the cornice. Audsley's Bowling Green Building seems a descendant of the Wainwright with the simplicity of its composition and its strength of emphasis at the top and bottom and upon the vertical piers between. The similar strength of relief in the Layton Gallery implies that Audsley arrived at the solution on his own: he had a sense of decisiveness and unity in classical design equal to Sullivan's. The one objection which one might make to the Bowling Green Building, however, is to the ornament, which does not sink into the architectural surfaces and become one with them so completely as in Sullivan's Wainwright and its successors. In the end, in this comparison Audsley emerges as a man capable of grasping fundamental design problems, but hobbled by what must be called a failure of nerve (or imagination) which caused him to attempt novelty in ornament by borrowing from another innovator rather than by carrying his own line of reasoning to its logical end. But there must have been an advantage to this, at least in the case of the Layton Gallery design: borrowing from Thomson's lithic architecture enabled him to show his client, Layton, in advance just what his new "Anglo-Hellenic" style would look like and to reassure him that it had been sanctioned

by European authorities. Real innovation would have been too risky for Audsley.

How does one finally evaluate the architecture of the Layton Gallery? Layton's collection, which it was created to contain, was of good quality but fundamentally conventional for America in the 1880s, as Lillian Miller demonstrates (pp. 21-29). Layton selected his architect, Audsley, somewhat by chance, and Audsley adapted 'Greek' Thomson's style, although with extraordinary skill. Layton and his supervisory architect, Mix, saw to it that this striking design was executed accurately and faithfully, if necessarily in sometimes ersatz materials.

The resulting building was nonetheless remarkable for being carried off so well. One of the greatest monuments of the Scottish neo-Greek actually once stood in Milwaukee. Audsley showed that he could be even more "Greek" than 'Greek' Thomson. He understood the power of the post and lintel: how to set it in deep relief, how to emphasise the heft and squareness of its members with incised ornament, and how to elaborate it in tightly compressed, layered compositions. This may have been anachronistic in the 1880s, which was a time of brick arched construction, but when the angular grid of steel skyscraper construction emerged around 1890, one canny Scot was as ready as any American

and rose magnificently to the occasion.

## Notes

During my research for this essay a great number of people were wonderfully helpful, especially Ronald Hubby of the University of Liverpool, who spent a rainy day taking me around all Audsley's buildings in that city, and also the Milwaukee Art Museum research staff members Charles Sable and Elizabeth Fernandez-Gimenez, my research assistants Kevin Murphy and Jane Egan, and a number of English historians who helped about Audsley's origins: Clive Wainwright, Michael Darby, Frank Kelsell, Andrew Saint and Ted Hubbard. I also owe thanks to Elizabeth Doermann, Irena Murray, David Brownlee, and Sarah Landau.

1. The story of the building is summarised by May Murphy Thibadeau in her book *For the Good of Others: the Life and Times of Frederick Layton* (River Falls, WI: University of Wisconsin-River Falls Press, 1984), pp. 80-85.
2. 'Neo-Greek' was a widely used and striking stylistic designation or somewhat variously defined. I treat it in the context of American architecture in my essay – 'Sullivan to 1890,' in *Louis Sullivan: the Function of Ornament* (New York: Norton, 1986).
3. *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Apr. 6, 1888. Also reproduced in the inaugural publication *Opening of the Layton Art Gallery*, Milwaukee, 1888, pp. 10-11.
4. Partridge Papers, Archives Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.
5. On Mix, see John Richard Burrows, *The Work of E. Townsend Mix From 1856 to 1890*, (Master's thesis, University of Virginia, 1980).
6. This is a point that needs further exploration. See Sharon Darling, *Chicago Ceramics and Glass* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1979), esp. pp. 195-204.
7. The primary source remains his friend, T. Scott Buhrman's biographical sketch appended to Audsley's *Temple of Tone*, (New York and Birmingham, England: J. Fischer and Bro., 1925). Based on this are Talbot Hamlin's profile in the *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Scribner's, 1928) and R. Hubby "The

*Continued on next page*

Versatility of George Ashdown Audsley L.I.D. (1838-1925)." Also: "George Ashdown Audsley, F.R.I.B.A.," *The Biograph and Review* 26, 5 (Feb. 1881), pp. 198-206, and "Contemporary British Architects," in *Building News* 58 (Mar. 1, 1890). Copies of his publications survive in the possession of his descendants in London and in the New York Public Library, the latter donated in 1945 by his friend the Rev. V. A. Parsell. Audsley's death certificate was found for me by Jane Egan.

8. Cited in note 7.
9. The two Thomsonsque Liverpool buildings are discussed in an unpublished manuscript by Tristram Spence in the University of Liverpool Library.
10. On Thomson, see Ronald McFadzean, *The Life and Works of Alexander Thomson* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).
11. Published in the *American Architect and Building News*, discussed in "The Tall Buildings of New York," *Munsey's Magazine*, Mar. 1898, pp. 833-48. Contrary to declarations in some recent architectural guides, it still stands at 9 Broadway, with several floors added at the top.
12. There is a photograph of a drawing for a splendid Gothic facade, labelled "Design for Roman Catholic Cathedral, New York, USA .... Cancelled because another architect had a contract-the Edward the Confessor given in recompence, followed by other contracts."
13. *The Organ of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1919); *Organ-stops and their Artistic Registration* (New York: H. W. Gray, 1921); *The Temple of Tone*, 1925.
14. Cited as such by Buhrman, *The Temple of Tone* (note 13), p. 249.
15. On these galleries, see Gerald D. Bolas, "One Hundred Years of Washington University Art Collecting," *Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis, Missouri: Illustrated Checklist of the Collection* (St. Louis: Washington University, 1981); *Art Palace of the West: a Centennial Tribute, 1881-1981* (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Art Museum, 1981); *From the Inside: the Archives of the Detroit Institute of Arts, 1883-1945* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1980). See also a brilliant losing design by J. Walter Stevens for the Detroit gallery: *American Architect and Building News* 23, 634 (Feb. 18, 1888). On this whole movement, see Walter Smith, *Art*

*Education, Scholastic and Industrial* (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1873); Stuart MacDonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (New York: American Elsevier, 1970).

16. Henry Cole, *Fifty Years of Public Work*, 2 vols. (London, 1884).
17. On the recently restored Hill mansion, see Elisabeth W. Doermann and Ellen M. Rosenthal, "Introducing the Hill House," *Minnesota History* 46, 8 (Winter 1979), pp. 328-35.
18. On Hunt, see Paul R. Baker, *Richard Morris Hunt* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980); Susan R. Stein, ed., *The Architecture of Richard Morris Hunt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). On Cudell, see my essay cited above (note 2) in *Louis Sullivan*, pp. 31-33.
19. The house was published in a splendid pair of volumes by Edward Strahan (Earl Shinn), *Mr. Vanderbilt's House and Collection* (New York, Boston, and Philadelphia: 1883-84) See also *New York Times*, Mar. 8, 1882, and the *American Architect and Building News* 9, 282 (May 21, 1881). Also, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *In the Pursuit of Beauty* (New York, 1987), pp. 120-23. On Atwood's design team; see Francis Swales, "Master Draftsmen, V," *Pencil Points* 5 (Aug. 1924), pp. 38-54.
20. Leland Roth, *McKim, Mead and White, Architects* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), pp. 288-92.
21. *Opening of the Layton Art Gallery* (note 3), pp. 120-122.
22. He is recorded thusly in the registers of the National Academy of Design in New York. On his European training, see H. L. Conrad, *History of Milwaukee County* (Chicago and New York: American Biographical Publishing Company, 1895) 11: p. 82, and Porter Butts, *Art in Wisconsin* (Madison: Madison Art Association, 1936), p. 120.
23. Butts (note 22), asserts this.
24. Michael Darby, *The Islamic Perspective: an Aspect of British Architecture and Design* (London: World of Islam Festival, 1983): 131-32; "Lord Leighton et son habitation de Holland-Park Road (Londres)," *La Construction Moderne*, Feb. 15, 1896, pp. 236-37.
25. *The Second Empire: the Arts Under Napoleon III* (Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1979), sec. 1, entry 22.
26. See McFadzean (note 10); also Nikolas Pevsner, *Some Architectural Writers of the*

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29. Examining the situation in general from a distance, the intelligent New York architect Leopold Eidlitz cites Fergusson about as much as Ruskin in his 1881 *Nature and Function of Art*.
30. Carl W. Condit, *The Chicago School of Architecture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). Condit and Sarah Landau are about to publish an important study of the early New York skyscraper.

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# The Sacred and Aesthetic Principles of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson's Architecture

*Continued from our last issue*

## A Synthesis of Old and New Testaments

ORIGINALLY, there was no organ in [St Vincent Street] church (the present one was sympathetically added in 1904), and the large windows to the south would have been completely unobstructed. Beneath the windows is the pulpit and screen made of North American pine (moved forwards in accommodating the organ). This grand design seems to celebrate a transitional line, and is expressed as a ceremonial entrance to some inner sanctuary with two great portals flanking the pulpit, preceded by a series of steps and stages. Similar screens appeared in Thomson's other U.P. churches, Caledonia Road and Queen's Park. It seems that their symbolic purpose could be to commemorate the 'veil' across the inner shrine of Solomon's Temple which housed the Ark of the Covenant, superseded in the Christian church by the new covenant with God.

E.C. Hakewill in his book, *The Temple*, appealed that we should still 'mark the ancient boundary' and saw it as

'a universal symbolism which at no period has been changed: the heathen marked off the adytum from the naos, as the Jew did the Holy of Holies from the sanctuary, and as we do the chancel from the nave.'

Thomson himself in the Second Haldane Lecture noted a common sacred purpose between the Jewish temple and the sanctuary of a Greek temple, in serving to mark a distinction between common place behaviour and that expressive of adoration:

'But whether there was an image representing the majesty of God, or an ark containing the laws of God, it was found necessary to screen it from the vulgar gaze.'

Within the main body of the church, rising two levels from the upper ground floor to the clearstorey, a vertical, aspirational layering of meaning can be read, resting on the solid foundations already described. Supporting the gallery above, on the ground floor are six highly original cast iron columns, (two rows of three). Directly above, at the gallery level there are six more similar columns, supporting the clearstorey, yet they have modified capitals.

The ornamental components of the florid circular capitals appear to be the same above and below, yet the components of the capitals at ground floor point downwards and are cast in shadow by a deep rim, whilst the ones at gallery level are revealed and point upwards. It would appear that the capitals were conceived of as flowers that open in the light supplied by the larger windows at gallery

level. This may have spiritual analogy as well as naturalistic.

Biblically *light* is used as a description of God's power, for light, invisible in itself, manifests everything. There are numerous biblical references to light. Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world*," (John ch.8, vs.12. Good News translation) and Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians (ch. 5, vs.8. Good News translation) wrote,

For though you were once all darkness, now as Christians you are light. Live like men who are at home in daylight, for where light is, there all goodness springs up, all justice and truth...And so the hymn says: 'Awake, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine upon you.'

## A Mediator between Heaven and Earth

What do we see here? A group of beautiful forms, so full of thought that they seem to think. They seem possessed of some high, contemplative, rapturous kind of life altogether different from any of the ordinary or natural sorts....that assemblage of angelic forms, that holy sisterhood standing as mediators between earth and heaven, sending upwards the prayers and praises of men, and drawing downwards the approbation and blessing of the eternal gods. (Haldane lectures, III, on the Acropolis of Athens)

The proportional study of St Vincent Street Church, illustrated at the end of this chapter,



does not pretend to be a definitive analysis, it does, however, hope to illustrate a principled and deliberate use of some primary geometrical figures in plan, section and elevation, even if it seems certain that there are other layers of subtlety yet to be discovered.

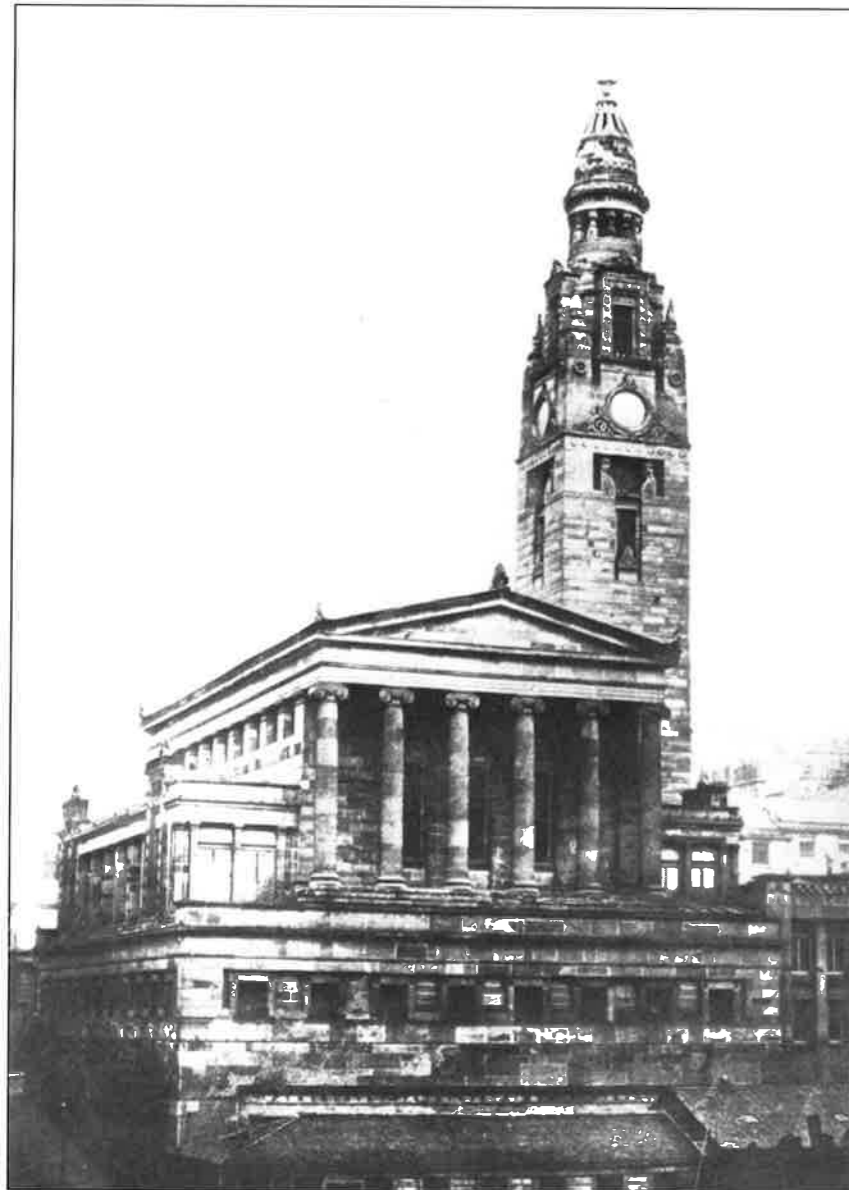
The manifestation of certain proportional relationships in plan is inherent at each level because of the need for structural continuity from top to bottom. Thus the footprint of the church is superimposed at each level, to differing degrees, with the proportions of the hall in the basement reflecting the walls of the clearstorey three

levels above. The observance of significant proportions in the plans is most apparent in the areas covered by the clearstorey. The broader body of the church at ground level is only an approximate square.

In the study of the church's elevations, the podium is seen to act as a base for the establishment of certain proportional relationships, taking up topographical differences of the site. The photograph illustrated (left) of c.1890, shows how from the south, the 'zig-zag' band of small windows running along the top of the podium would have been visible at distance above the low buildings to the

rear, and across a wide stretch of Glasgow. This band of windows has strong significance proportionally as the springing point of the perfect figure that implicitly but commandingly inscribes the church's Ionic portico. The figure discovered is the six pointed star or hexagram- shown in six of Hay's 'Seven Elements of Geometric Beauty' (right). The figure has a wealth of symbolic connotations, it is widely recognisable as the 'Star of David' or sometimes 'Solomon's Seal', and has traditionally been seen to represent a mediation between heaven – the upward pointing triangle – and earth – the downward-pointing triangle (An Illustrated Encyclopædia of Traditional Symbols). Professor Curl's observation of the numeric significance of six columns is obviously given further support by the discovery of this figure.

The church's prostyle porticoes are derived from the east front of the Erechtheion at Athens, as has been noted. A book written by Claude Bragdon, *The Beautiful Necessity* of 1910, provides indirect corroboration of the proportions discovered in the north and south elevations of St Vincent Street Church, through his own short analysis of the Erechtheion. In a chapter entitled 'Latent Geometry', he published a diagram showing the 'application of the equilateral triangle to the Erechtheum at Athens' (lower right). With regard to the wider application of the equilateral triangle in architecture, he wrote that,



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In the study of the church's elevations, the podium is seen to act as a base for the establishment of certain proportional relationships, taking up topographical differences of the site. The photograph illustrated (left) of c.1890, shows how from the south, the 'zig-zag' band of small windows running along the top of the podium would have been visible at distance above the low buildings to the

rear, and across a wide stretch of Glasgow. This band of windows has strong significance proportionally as the springing point of the perfect figure that implicitly but commandingly inscribes the church's Ionic portico. The figure discovered is the six pointed star or hexagram- shown in six of Hay's 'Seven Elements of Geometric Beauty' (right). The figure has a wealth of symbolic connotations, it is widely recognisable as the 'Star of David' or sometimes 'Solomon's Seal', and has traditionally been seen to represent a mediation between heaven – the upward pointing triangle – and earth – the downward-pointing triangle (An Illustrated Encyclopædia of Traditional Symbols). Professor Curl's observation of the numeric significance of six columns is obviously given further support by the discovery of this figure.

The church's prostyle porticoes are derived from the east front of the Erechtheion at Athens, as has been noted. A book written by Claude Bragdon, *The Beautiful Necessity* of 1910, provides indirect corroboration of the proportions discovered in the north and south elevations of St Vincent Street Church, through his own short analysis of the Erechtheion. In a chapter entitled 'Latent Geometry', he published a diagram showing the 'application of the equilateral triangle to the Erechtheum at Athens' (lower right). With regard to the wider application of the equilateral triangle in architecture, he wrote that,

'It may be stated as a general rule that whenever three important points in any architectural composition coincide (approximately or exactly) with the three extremities of an equilateral triangle, it makes for beauty of proportion.'

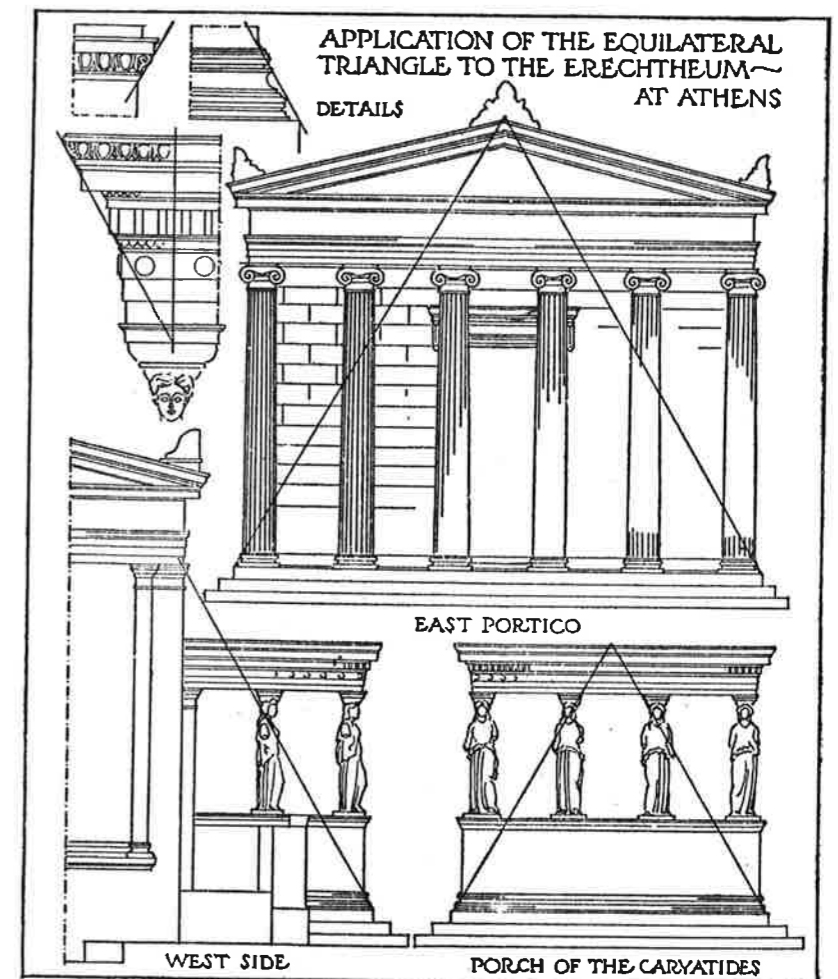
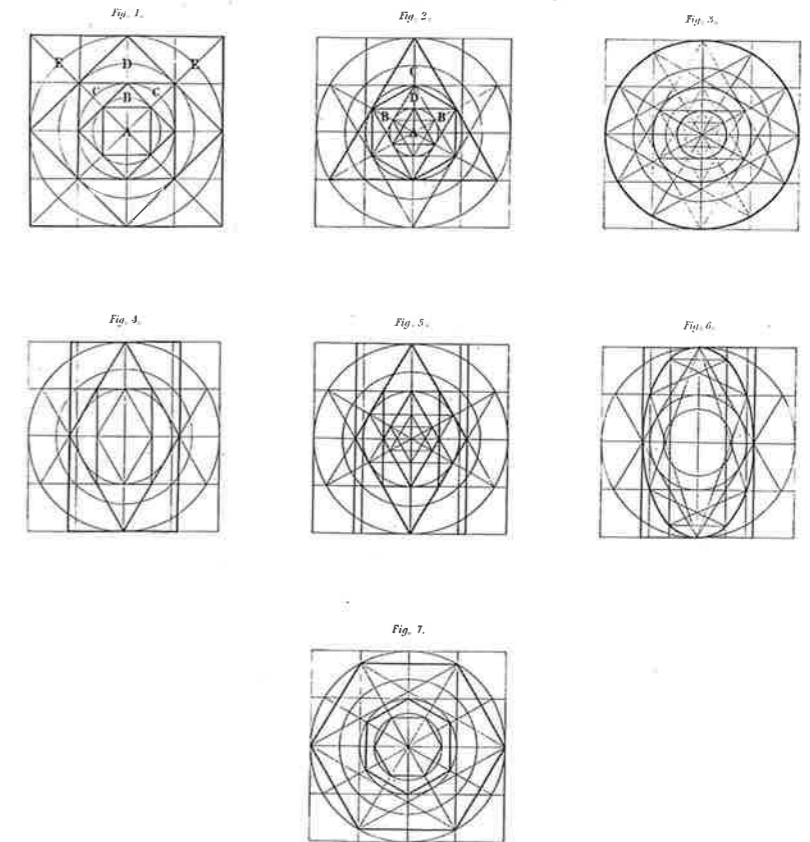
The west elevation of St Vincent Street Church would appear to have been composed using primarily squares, derivative rectangles (such as the root-five) and forty-five degree lines. The powerfully compressed entrance embedded into the plinth, is shown to have a dynamic relationship with the purely symbolical portal above it.

Although these proportional relationships are set up flatly in elevation and are therefore difficult to perceive from street level because of the way the clearstorey steps back; a rational, explicit perception of these implicit abstract relationships is perhaps not necessary for a subtle appreciation of them. The interplay between the various elements and the whole structure may only be detected sub-consciously after having experienced the building from a variety of view points. The degree to which Thomson wove the structure with proportional harmonies, may also have been an act of faith; in the fourth Haldane Lecture he noted in appreciation of the Greeks that, "The Gods see everywhere."

### The Tower

Not only do the porticoes appear to have been harmonised within a six pointed star but

The seven elements of Geometric Beauty.



also the upper part of the tower seems to correspond with a repetition of the same figure. Implicit within the two interlocking stars are two *Vesica Pisces*, a smaller one within a larger one. These stretch from the centre of the clock to the top of the anthemion ornament. Held within the *Vesicas* are the four great portals of the tower, proclaiming themselves to the four corners of Glasgow. The evangelical message of the portals, and others used rhetorically elsewhere in the church, such as on the west elevation, seems clear; in the Gospel of John, Jesus says,

'I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved and go in and out and find pasture.' (John ch.10, vs.9. King James translation).

The clocks immediately below the portals, celebrated in swathes of ornament, architecturally, and geometrically herald the portals, and may be read literally as the passage of time, and perhaps the succession of the Old Covenant with the New, or in prospect of a new Christian era. (The clocks were only installed in the tower in 1884, but they were almost certainly anticipated in the original design.)

The strikingly original 'T'-shaped windows and pairs of caryatid heads facing each other, beneath the clocks were the subject of intense debate between Sam McKinstry and Professor Curl. The windows were read by Professor Curl as representing the 'Tau' symbol of Freemasonry, whilst McKinstry



thought a more likely reading of them would be as the early church' representation of the cross. McKinstry also noted that the paired heads seem to correspond with a description in the Book of Exodus of the cherubim that were placed, upon divine instruction, at either end of the 'mercy seat' (the cover of the holy Ark). The passage from the King James translation (Exodus ch. 25, vs.18-22) reads:

"And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end...And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look to one another...And there I will meet with thee from above the mercy seat, from

between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony..."

In *Newsletter* No. 17, Sam McKinstry interpreted the cherubims at St Vincent Street by echoing the New Testament lesson in Hebrews, writing that, 'The message is that the Presence betwixt the cherubim known to the children of Israel was indeed Christ, the fulfilment of the Old Testament.' McKinstry also noted that in measured drawings by A.L. Watson of 1940 a cross appeared in the glazing behind each pair of cherubim (also just visible in the c.1890 photograph), marking in elevation the point between them at which at which their gaze meets. Cherubim or angels are referred to elsewhere in the Bible and share the same significance:

'What are they all but ministrant spirits, sent out to serve, for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?' (Hebrews ch.2, vs. 14. Good News translation.)

An interesting implicit angular relationship has been discovered, relating the cherubim with the upper body of the church. If two lines are taken from the exact point at which the gaze of the cherubim meets, and are projected downwards in either north or south elevation towards the church they are found to intersect the *antefixae*, either side of the pediment at thirty degrees and sixty degrees, respectively; whilst in the west elevation there is an implicit right angled relationship with both of the portals at gallery level. So, in a sense, a harmonic

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umbrella is conferred upon the church from 'between the cherubim', perhaps in prayerful hope of direct communion with God.

Flanking the portals of the tower are 'egg'-shaped finials that begin to dissolve the tower and anticipate the perforated dome above. Also at this stage the tower becomes an octagon, before emerging as a cylinder above the portals. A little above the anthemion of the portals the continuity of the cylinder is interrupted by twelve squat columns. *Twelve* is a number of great biblical significance – the twelve stones taken out of Jordan, the Twelve Disciples, the twelve foundation stones of the New Jerusalem, or perhaps the Twelve Tribes of Israel, brought together to one by Christ. There is perhaps corroboration that Thomson was consciously seeking to invoke the attributes of *twelve*, in that the diameter of the cylinder approximates to twelve feet (12'4"), whilst the distance from the top of the tower's ultimate finial to the base of the cylinder approximates closely to thirty-six feet (35'10"). The general arrangement of this upper part of the church may have been suggested to Thomson in the nearby example of St George's Tron Church of 1807 by William Stark, which also has twelve columns supporting its perforated dome.

The culmination of the tower, however, has roused much speculation as to its pictorial derivations and meaning. Thomson's imagination may have been

fired by images of Indian domes and *stupas* as published in books such as those by the Daniell brothers (*The Architecture, Antiquities, and Landscape Scenery of Hindoostan*, 1816) and James Fergusson's several works. The bathetic suggestion that the dome derived from a Glasgow policeman's helmet nevertheless raises speculation of the dome as 'celestial helmet'. E. Baldwin Smith, in his book entitled *The Dome – a study in the history of ideas* of 1971, wrote that:

The one symbolic domical concept of great antiquity in the Near East which can be most definitely connected with Palestine and Christian writings is the idea of a celestial helmet... The lasting appeal of this particular domical shape and its direct link with Christianity came when its sky symbolism was combined with that of the *piloi* and the cosmic egg cult in the Dioskouri... the popularity of these ancient heroes, themselves born in an egg, came from their having become the intermediaries between men and gods, and the dispensers of immortality... their conoid bonnets, or helmets, surmounted by stars, became the common symbol of the cult and were identified with the cosmic egg...

The most obvious Christian symbolic interpretation of the conoid dome, and the one most likely subscribed to by Thomson, is that of an egg symbolising new life, resurrection and perhaps Christ *advenient*. Thomson himself said in the final Haldane Lecture that, 'the form of the egg being beautiful in itself, and in having many

pleasing associations, it is not wonderful that man should seek to reproduce it in his work.'

## Biblical Measurements

Sam McKinstry in *Newsletter* No.8, in his account of Solomon's temple, as described in the First Book of Kings, took the interpretative step of converting from cubits into metres. The precise measure of a cubit is an area of speculation, or at least it was in Thomson's day. Perhaps, however, more importantly in the biblical descriptions of buildings in terms of cubits, is the numerical values of the measurements, each of which may be held to have some meaning.

The possible numerical significance of key dimensions in the upper reaches of the tower has been noted above; another perhaps more remarkable sequence of measurements, however, is found to occur around the upper 'temple' part of the church itself. Measurements taken from the photogrammetric drawings, using the bottom step of the portico as the datum level, reveal length and breadth measurements of 99'9" by 49'5", whilst a height from the underside of the cornice to this bottom step measures as 30'3". It may be recalled from the description in Exodus, that Moses was instructed to make the court of the Tabernacle one hundred cubits long by fifty wide (Exodus ch.27, vs.18). In the opening pages of *The Erechtheion at Athens*, H.W.

Inwood noted, regarding the Tabernacle, that:

From the general description recorded by the ancient historians and by Josephus is detailed the various interesting particulars of this first important instance of raising a temple...The space enclosed Josephus called 'æthrium or artrium [sic]: it extended a hundred cubits, and was in width fifty.

The same dimensions are described again but for a different building further on in the Bible. In the account of the House of the Forest of Lebanon, it is written of Solomon that, 'He built the House of the Forest of Lebanon, a hundred cubits long, fifty broad and thirty high.' (1 Kings ch.7, vs.2 Good News translation.) It is commonly held that the primary purpose of the building was religious and judicial rather than domestic and Solomon was viewed as priest as well as king. If it is not coincidence, perhaps Thomson perceived an archetypal significance in the dimensions.

McFadzean in *The Life and Works of Alexander Thomson* suggested that Thomson had adopted the idea of the Gothic or Early Christian section, allowing him to express the church as a classical temple at clearstorey level, above the approximately square space that was necessary to house a big congregation. It may be noted, however, that the idea of a clearstorey is present in biblical descriptions of Solomon's Temple and the House of the Forest of Lebanon. James Fergusson, in *The Palaces of*

*Nineveh and Persepolis Restored* of 1851, comparatively examined the similarities in arrangement of the Solomonic structures and those of Nineveh and Persepolis (ruins of which had recently been discovered). He illustrated some alternative sectional diagrams, based on the descriptions of the House of the Forest of Lebanon (*top right*) that may be seen to have a basic generic similarity with St Vincent Street Church (*above, right*). Fergusson also noted that unlike the Temple of Solomon, the House of the Forest of Lebanon was built 'in the city itself, and surrounded apparently by the habitations of his subjects'; whereas the former was built outside the walls of Jerusalem.

Thomson may have had more reverence for the 'English foot' than we do for the modern metre which is solely based upon commodity. In the second Haldane Lecture, Thomson mentioned specific dimensions of the Great Pyramid, as '764 feet square at the base, and 480 feet high'. In 1859 John Taylor published a book entitled *The Great Pyramid, Why was it Built? and Who Built it?* In the course of his broad-reaching analysis, he noted that,

A peculiar property of the English foot in connection with the measure of the base of the Great Pyramid is, that when we

divide unity by 764 (the number of feet in the side of the base) the quotient gives the number of feet in the circumference of the Earth as it was measured in the latitude of the Great Pyramid. This may be deemed as nothing more than a numerical coincidence; but when we recollect that this foot alone expresses this relation, and that the measure by which it is expressed may possibly have had its origin at this time, and may even have been called into existence to denote this proportion, it seems a peculiarity which deserves notice.... one English foot bears the same ratio to the side of the Pyramid, that the circumference of the Earth bears to one hundred millions of English feet.

## Conclusions

Attempts to overtly associate St Vincent Street Church with any one biblical precedent seem unlikely both in terms of the often highly detailed descriptions given in the Bible and in recognition of Thomson's progressive faith. It does seem likely, however, that Thomson was aiming to realise a modern

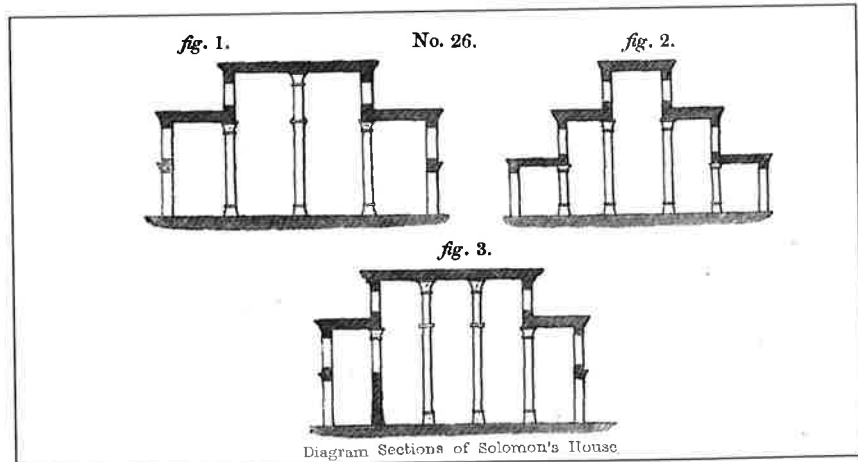
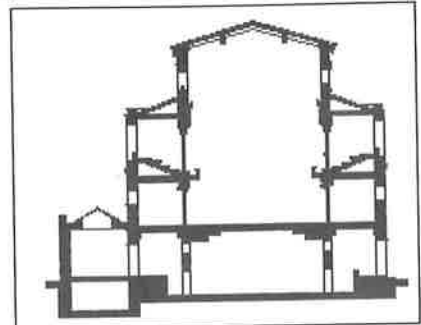


Diagram Sections of Solomon's House

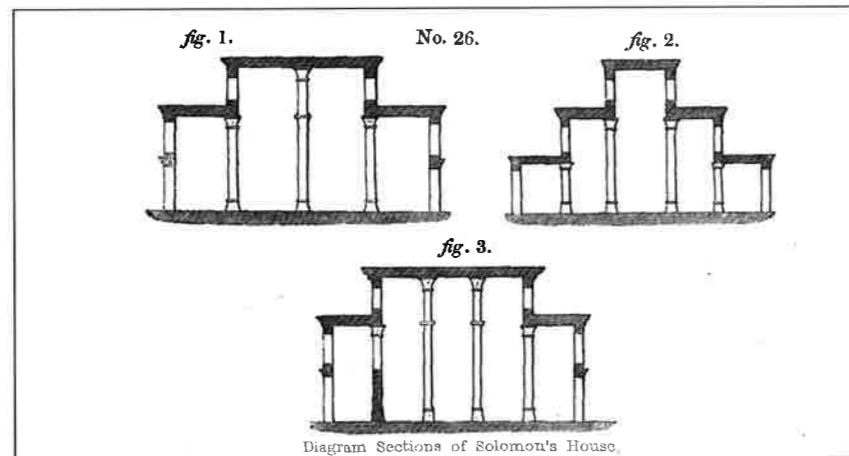


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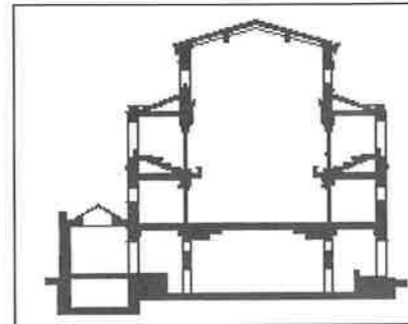
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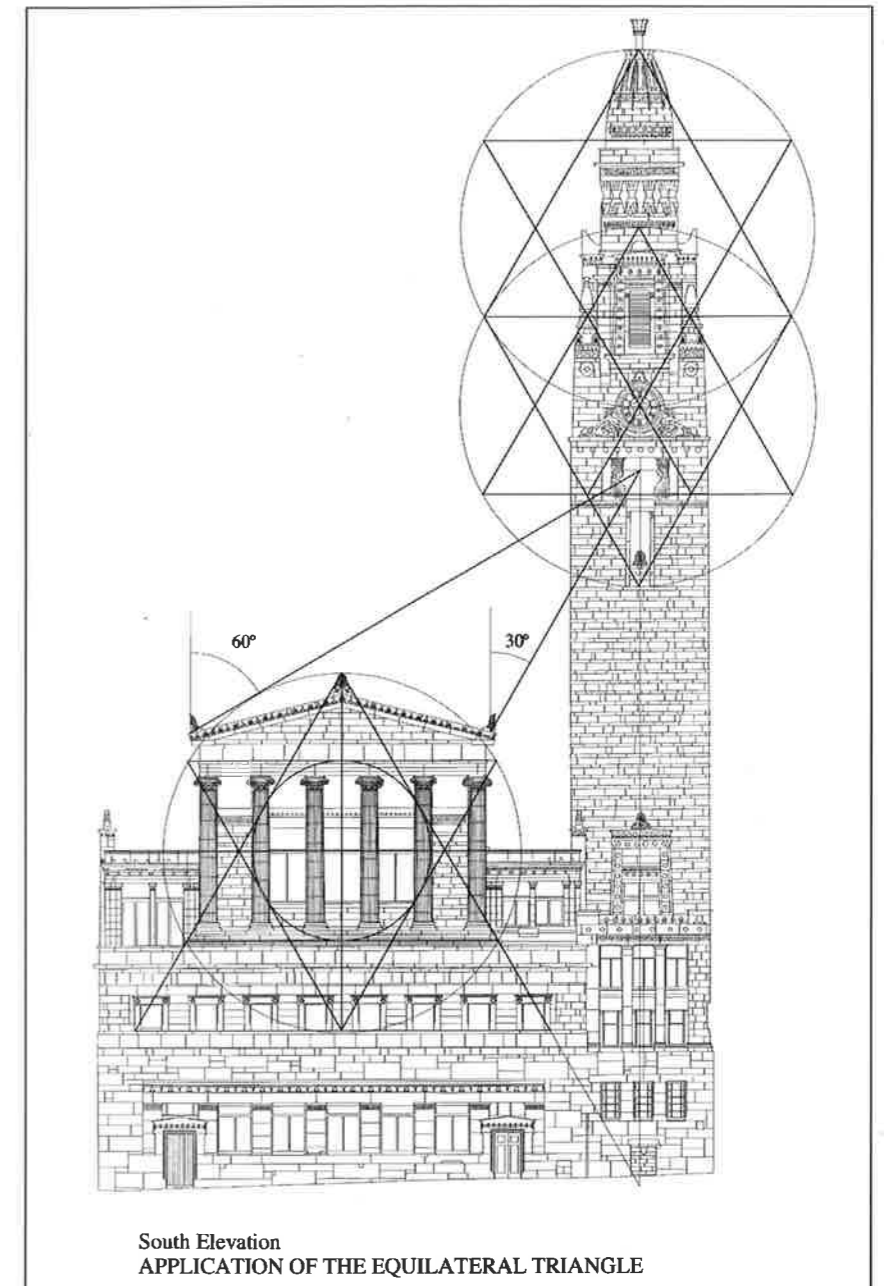
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version of the archetype common in the highest expressions of religious architecture, based on the sacred principles illumined by the most perfect examples of the past. It seems evident that he perceived all 'biblical architecture', from Noah's Ark to John's revelation of the New Jerusalem, to be various manifestations of the same divine blueprint.

Thomson perceived in the Greeks similar qualities to the Jews of the Old Testament, and in the remains of Grecian architecture he saw essences that were consistent with scriptural prototypes. The Greeks seem to have informed Thomson's imaginings on vanished Jewish architecture, but unlike perhaps some of his predecessors, he was not primarily interested in reproducing a correct biblical style. Rather Thomson was determined to kind the key to designing works in a *co-creative duty*. His work may be seen as both Greek and biblical. He genuinely seems to have been working from 'within' rather than just mimicking external appearances. This was after all what he implored others to do.

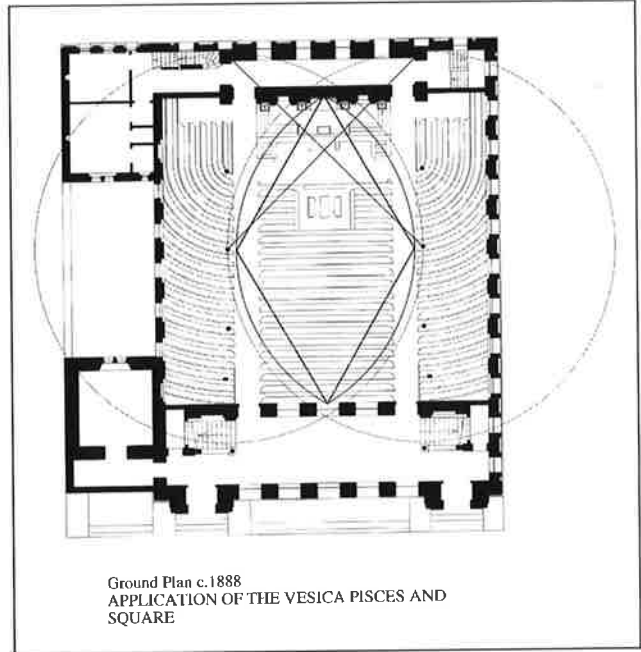
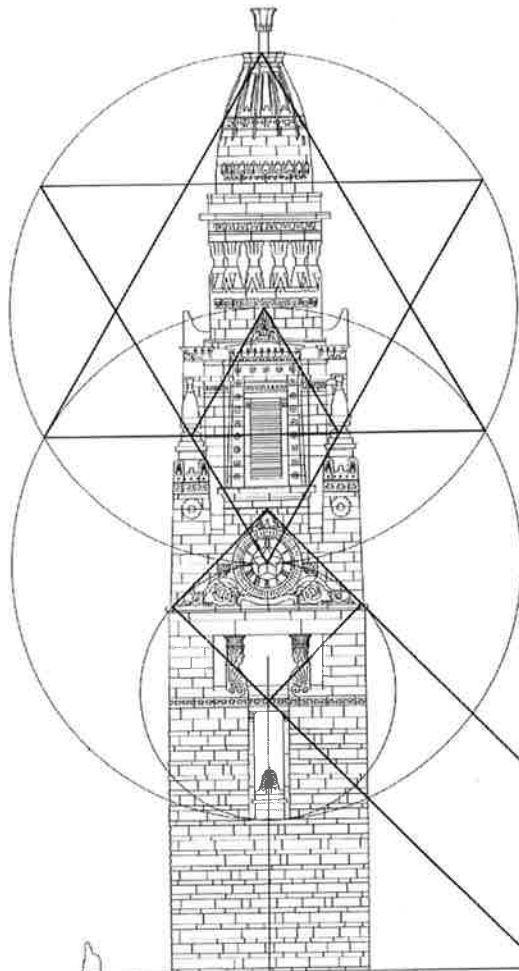
In the present age with its suspicion of 'systems', the concept of an absolute in beauty may be uncomfortable. Mathematics has become associated with utility, mechanisation and economy, an aspect of the divine has been harnessed, but at what price? Thomson's liberated conception of proportion was something poetic, something that enabled him to see a divine pattern through all of nature. His belief



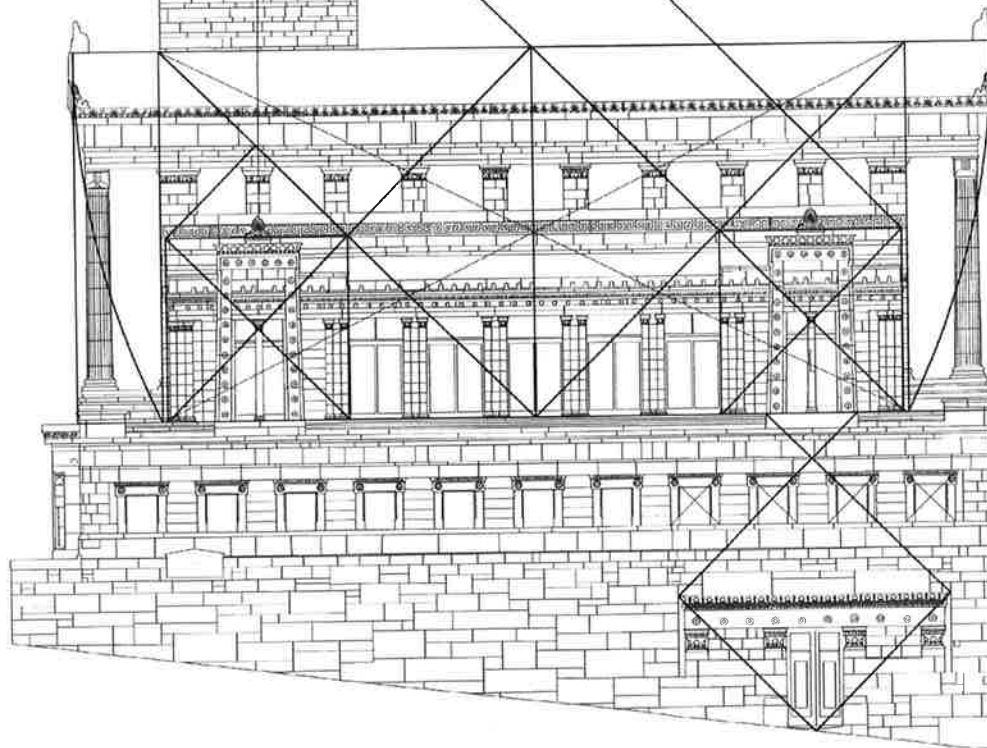
in universal truths empowered Thomson to see ancient works of art being as relevant to the present as they ever were. He appears to have heard the voices of the ancients more strongly and warmly than many of those vocal in his own time. Thomson's epithet 'Greek' must be read as a high accolade. The achievements of Greek civilisation represent a high water mark in the history of art and ideas; the work of Alexander Thomson deserves similar recognition.

## Acknowledgements

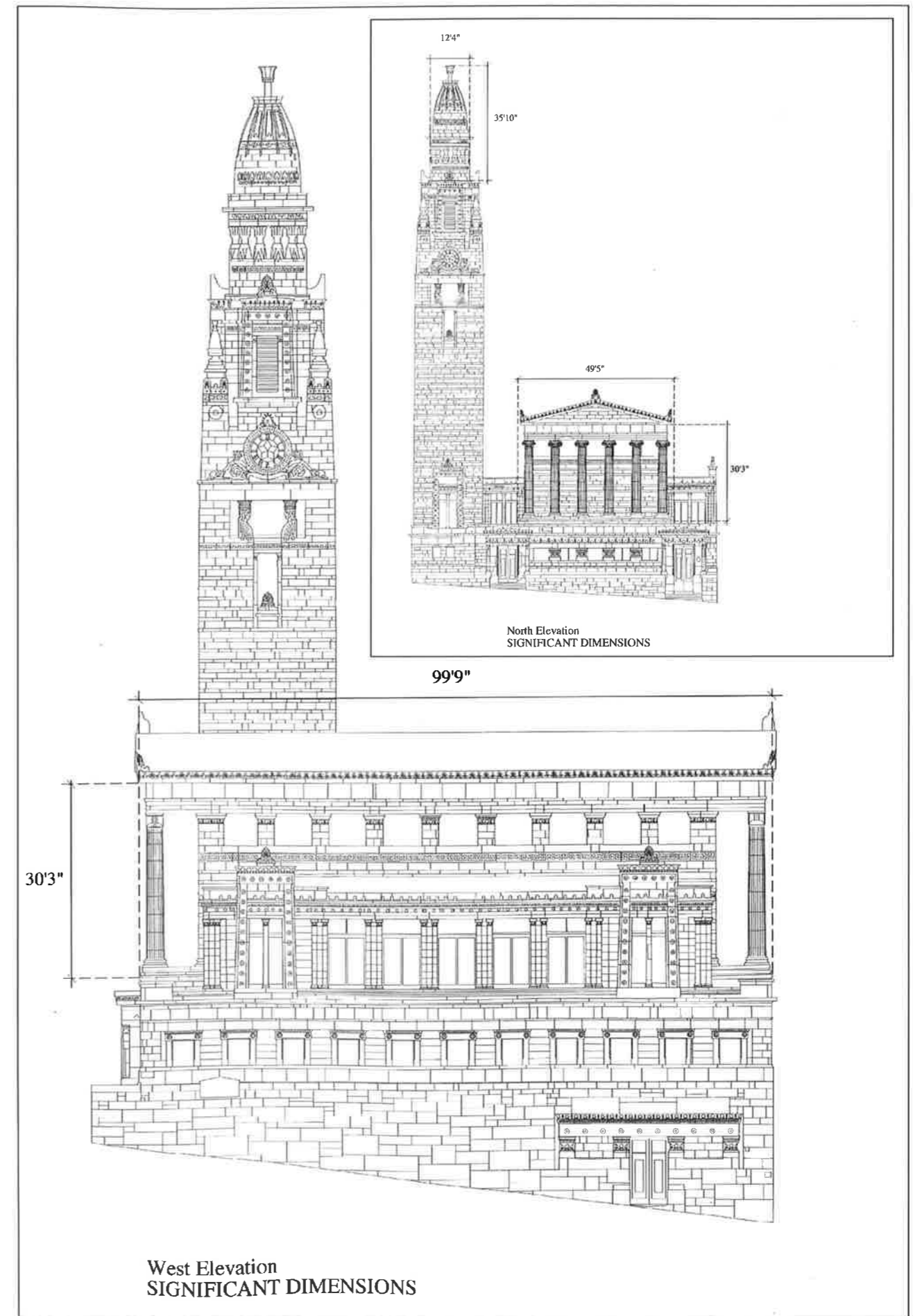
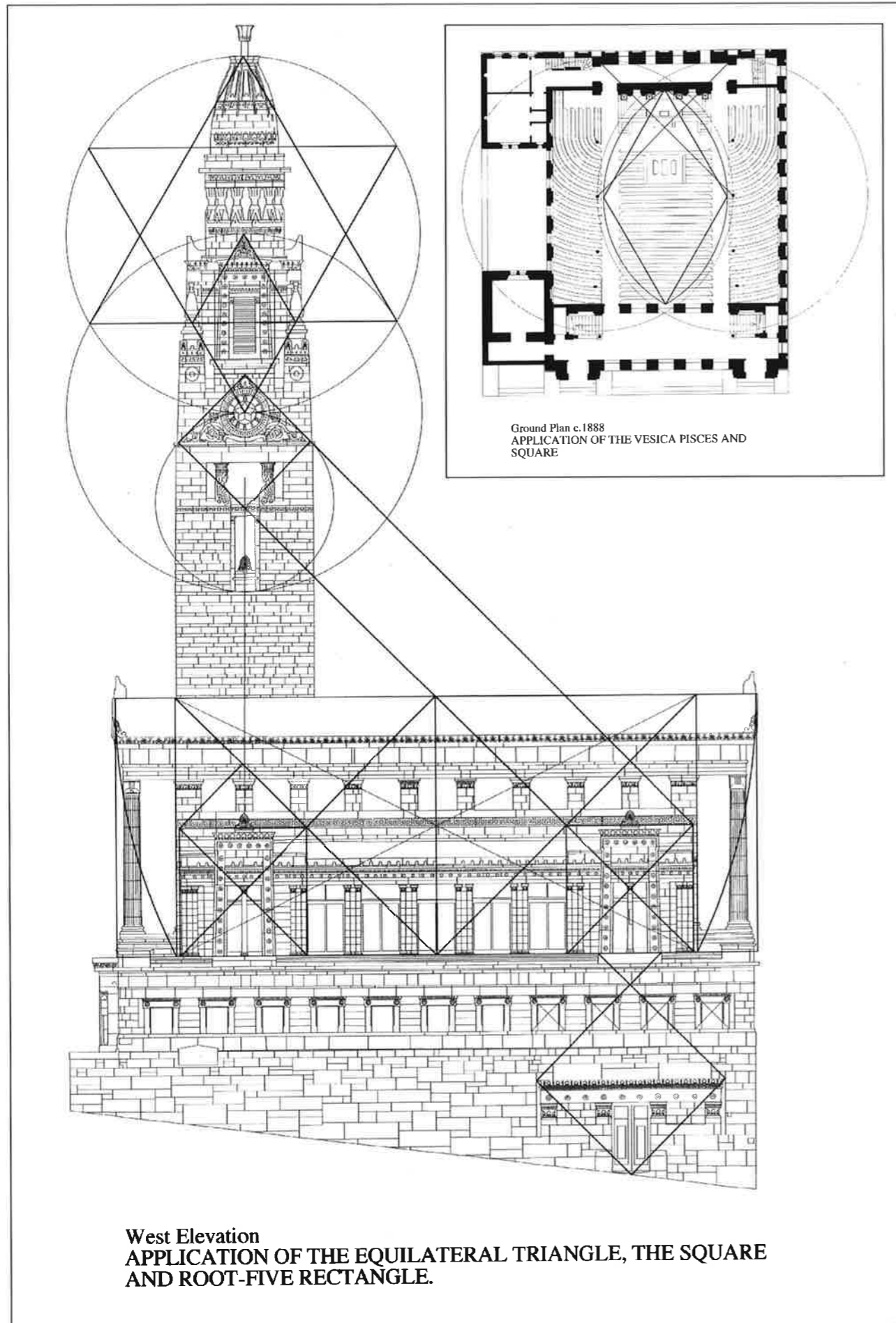
The author acknowledges with thanks the assistance of Glasgow City Council Development & Regeneration Services and Page & Park, Architects. The photogrammetric survey drawings of 1992 are reproduced with the permission of George Kirton of Glasgow City Council Property services Department and from plans made whilst at Page & Park Architects of the church as it was in 1888 (so as not to pick up alterations made after Thomson's death).

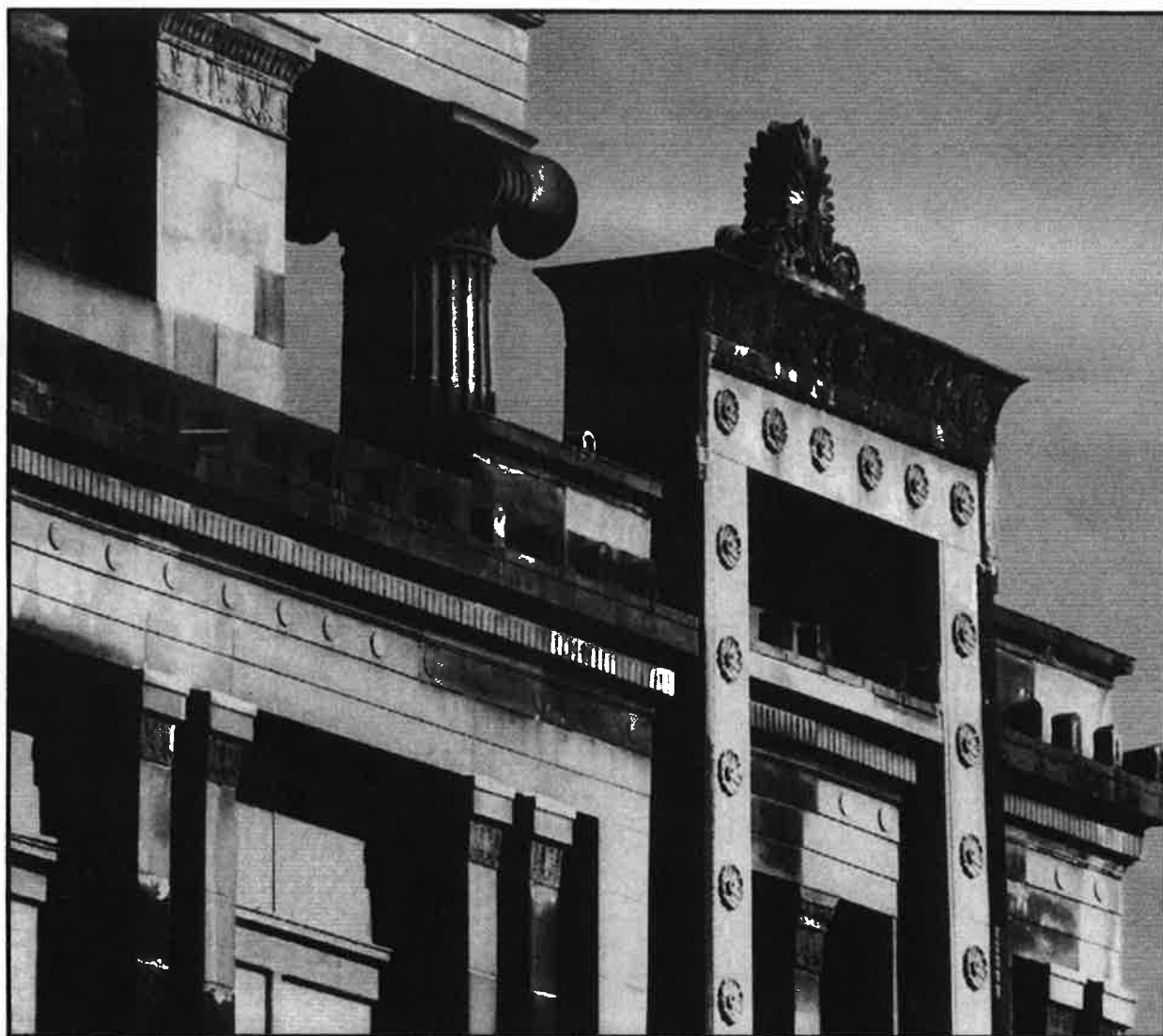


Ground Plan c.1888  
APPLICATION OF THE VESICA PISCES AND  
SQUARE



West Elevation  
APPLICATION OF THE EQUILATERAL TRIANGLE, THE SQUARE  
AND ROOT-FIVE RECTANGLE.





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